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*john pederson, jr.*

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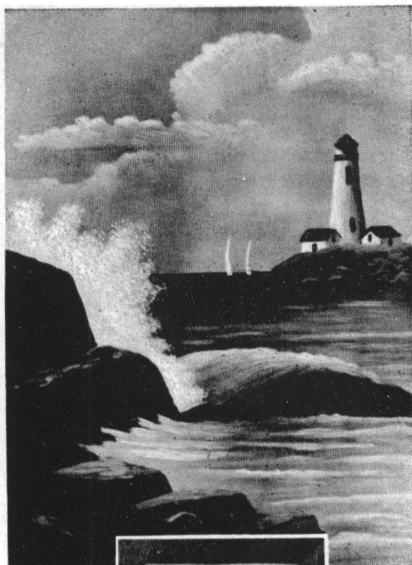
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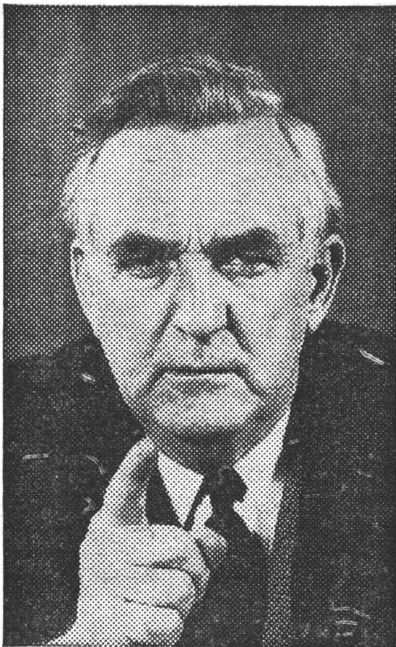


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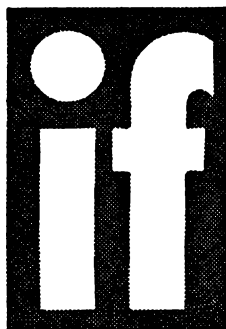
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# **WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION**

**JULY 1960**

**All Stories New and Complete**

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**Feature Editor : FREDERIK POHL**

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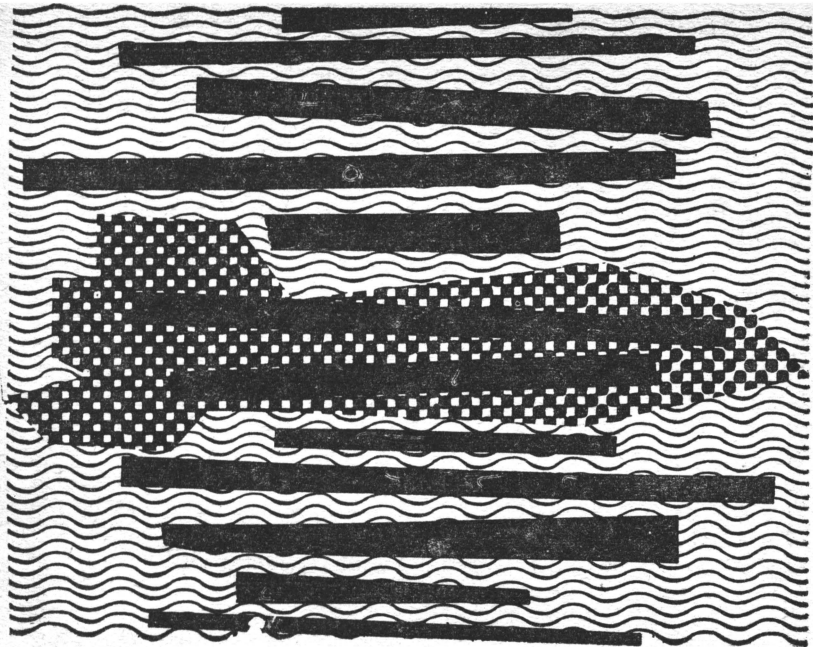
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By J. T. McINTOSH

Illustrated by RITTER

# in a body

*The odds against being found out were 2½ billion to one—and Vee was camouflaged to the very last hair!*

**I**T'S not so that two things can't occupy the same space at the same time. Certainly they can.

Of course, it doesn't do either of them any good.

It took only seven seconds for the huge, powerful, beautiful spaceship to become a

crumpled, disorganized mess coasting on aimlessly through space, and for the 192 passengers, with a single exception, to become quite dead.

Like all such disasters, it shouldn't have happened. It was supposed to be impossible. But safety devices have al-

ways had one peculiarity. They function perfectly on test; and when it isn't a test, but the real thing, they often don't function at all.

In this case, despite all the safety devices, the Vigintan ship inserted herself into normal space in the middle of a vast cloud of nebulous matter.

There were seven seconds of hell.

Afterward, what was left of the ship careered on, life casually deleted from it, lines twisted to grotesque deformity, all power and purpose in the giant engines blasted to absurdity.

A few of the passengers had had two or three seconds knowledge of disaster. Half a dozen had seven seconds of terror and helplessness and agony.

Only one had five seconds grace and was able to make use of it.

Vee was in the long outer passage on her way to the control room when it happened.

She was actually passing the open port of one of the lifeboat shells. At the first screaming, tearing intimations of mortal agony in the ship, she dived into the shell and pulled the emergency black handle. The tiny lifeboat slid shut with two seconds to spare, cast itself loose and scuttled away desperately from the parent ship.

**W**ITHIN a few minutes Vee knew from the blank silence of the radio that she was the sole survivor. Am was dead.

Her grief twisted her in knots. To a member of Vee's race, the death of a husband or wife was like . . . no, humans could never understand it.

Suppose a woman, watching, saw her husband, her three children and her mother and father die. Suppose in the same catastrophe all her friends, everybody who spoke her language, her native country and everything in it were obliterated.

That woman might feel as Vee felt at the death of Am.

But Vee had to go on living, if she could. She had much the same instinct of self-preservation as humans had, although Vee was not human. The fact that she didn't want to live was irrelevant.

She tried, unsuccessfully, to face the near certainty that whether she survived a hundred seconds or a hundred years more, she would never see any of her own kind again.

Over the vast distances of the Galaxy, radio was less useful, less reliable, than a bottle thrown in the sea on the wrong world. When a ship was wrecked, there wasn't a chance of a survivor ever being found. Hyperspace travel

was the only way to cross vast distances in a small fraction of a lifetime, and hyperspace travel was, by definition, a shorter distance between two points than a straight line.

At least you could search along a straight line. You couldn't search along a hyperspace route.

The one faint chance Vee had of ever seeing her home world again—negligible, but far greater than the chance of being picked up by a rescue ship—was finding some world where the inhabitants were approaching the starship stage of development.

Automatically the tiny lifeboat, so small that she could hardly change her position in it, was homing on the nearest world on which she might conceivably live. There was never any guarantee that there would be one within the light-year which was the boat's extreme limit; in fact, it was most unlikely.

However, Vee's lifeboat was already moving purposefully. The scanners had found something.

Without further delay, Vee threw the switch which would keep her in suspended animation until the boat reached its destination. There was nothing for her to do. The boat's electronic eyes had found a world on which it might be possible for her to survive. All she could do was

go there and find out whether it was possible or not—by living or dying.

"I WANT to know the truth, Bill," said Walt.

Dr. McEwan ran a hand through his five remaining hairs. "I wonder why people always want to know the worst, and won't be satisfied till they get it. I've told you there's nothing to worry about. You won't believe me. Obviously you're not going to believe anything except—"

"Bill, you ought to know me by this time," said Walt. "The one thing I can't take is uncertainty."

"There's no uncertainty! Sure, you may be smashed to pieces by a truck as you leave this office, but apart from that there's no particular reason why you shouldn't live another fifty years or so."

"Bill, I've played poker with you. You always lose because you can't bluff. Listen. I know it's right to conceal things from some people. Even if they beg you to tell them the truth, all they really want is reassurance. I'm different. I want to plan my life knowing I'm going to have it for a while, or knowing the other thing. Remember, Bill, it's me, Walt Rinker, you're talking to. Not somebody you know nothing about. I'm asking you as a friend. I want you to tell me as a friend."

"All right," said Dr. Mc-

Ewan after a pause. "It's leukemia. You're going to die."

Walt nodded quite calmly. "I knew it. How long have I got?"

"A year maybe."

Walt took a deep breath. "Well, that's a long time. Couple of hundred people in town are going to die before me. I'm pretty high on the list, but nowhere near the top. There's no chance, Bill? No treatment?"

"There's X-ray treatment that sometimes helps. But you asked me as a friend, Bill—if it were me, I wouldn't spend all my money and the rest of my time hanging around hospitals and dying anyway."

"Me neither. How long have I got more or less as I am now?"

The truth was too brutal. The blood count and the number of immature white cells present showed that the disease was already acute. In other words, although Walt was thin and in anything but glowing health now, he would never again be in as good shape as he was at present.

"Six months, perhaps," McEwan said.

There was silence for a moment. Then Walt said: "Thanks for telling me, Bill."

**J**ANET looked particularly desirable that night, her light tan wonderfully set off

by her white dress. She was a small, slim, one-hundred-per-cent-feminine brunette. No tomboy or tough, athletic, wise-cracking sex-bomb, Janet. She was eleven years younger than Walt and believed that a man ought to be master in his home.

She was so desirable that Walt resolved never to see her again.

Sure, she loved him. Sure, they could have been happy. Sure, she wasn't going to like what he was going to say.

But a broken romance at nineteen wasn't the end of the world, even though it would seem so at the time. It certainly wasn't as bad as being widowed at twenty, after spending six months watching the man you loved die.

"Honey," he said, "hang on to something. I'm going to kick you in the guts."

Her bright smile faded and tears filled her eyes. "So you know," she said.

"Mean you know, too? How?"

"Never mind. Did Dr. McEwan tell you?"

"I made him."

"He shouldn't have told you."

"By God, he should!" said Walt with sudden force. "This was the kind of thing I was afraid of, the kind of thing I was trying to avoid."

"What kind of thing?"

"Everybody knowing all



about it but me. People I don't like suddenly being nice to me. Me making plans and people humoring me, knowing I wasn't going to be around to follow through. Everybody thinking: 'I'm not going to be the one to tell him.'"

"Walt, what good does it do, your knowing that—"

He interrupted her impatiently. "That wasn't all, Janet. It doesn't matter any more, now that I know. What I was going to say was—I don't think we'd better see each other again after tonight."

She was hurt, frightened. She seemed to shrink. "That's certainly a dirty one," she whispered. "I wanted . . . I hoped . . . I thought we'd get married and have a little while—"

He shook his head decisively. "I can't do it, Janet. I want us to break here and now. It'll hurt you if we never see each other again after tonight, but it would hurt a hell of a lot more if we got married and I died just about the time our first kid would be born."

"Walt, you haven't had time to think about this. Can't you see, this is all the more reason for us to get married right away? Women get married in wartime, have a forty-eight-hour honeymoon, and often never see their husbands again. I—"

"For one thing," said Walt-

er drily, "people who do that are fools. For another, fools though they are, they're at least planning for the future. The men don't *expect* to die. Marriage is planning, Janet. It isn't diving into bed together today, because tomorrow it may not seem such a good idea. It's meant to be—"

"Forget what it's *meant* to be!" said Janet vehemently. "We can't plan for fifty years together, maybe. Some marriages don't last a year anyway."

"I'm not going to marry you knowing—"

"Then we *won't* get married. I don't care about marriage. If you don't want to get married with this hanging over you, I'll move in with you anyway."

"What's your mother going to say about that?"

"What my mother says doesn't matter!"

Walt stood up. "Honey, the longer we go on, the worse it gets. I guess I'd better go. Forget me as soon as you can."

Shutting his ears to her cry, he strode out without a glance over his shoulder.

**THE FACT** that Vee woke at all showed that the landing had been successful and that conditions on the planet she had landed on were not entirely impossible.

But there was something of at least equal importance

to be settled before she could think of going on living.

She threw the radio's net wide and switched on.

To her astonishment, she was almost blasted out of her tiny cell. There was more radio communication of more kinds on this world than on any she knew.

This, then, was a civilized world.

She didn't know whether to be glad or sorry.

For a while she thought of Am, drawing a little strength even from the memory of him. He would want her to find another soulmate, for he would want her to live. They had had no children, being spacebound. Am would want her to find another soulmate, because only if she did so could anything of him survive.

Vigintans needed companionship as they needed food and water. Almost as necessary as simple companionship was a soulmate. Not just a friend, not just a lover, but a spouse so close physically, mentally and spiritually that nothing divided them, nothing remained to divide them. Only with such a soulmate could any Vigintan approach happiness.

For hours Vee listened to the radio, concentrating with every cell in her mind on learning all she could of the people of this world. Soon, somehow, she must be able to

pass among them as one of themselves, no matter what they looked like.

As an alien you could be liked, you could be respected, you could even be revered. But you couldn't be loved.

So Vee had to become a human, down to the last physical decimal point, so human that she could reproduce as humans did, so human that it could never occur to anybody that she had ever been anything else.

That, for her, was quite possible.

Though she was no technician, the cathode tube was set up so that even uninformed fiddling would eventually try every possible adjustment, and at last she began to get television pictures.

**F**ROM then on, progress was easy. Even before she had any idea how these creatures who called themselves *men* and *women* were formed under their curiously elastic skins, she had begun to change her appearance to conform with theirs.

It was fortunate, Vee thought, that she was a woman. Many hours of watching TV gave her little or no information on the anatomy of the males, but provided a great deal about the anatomy of females. She saw chorines' legs flashing in so many routines that she was able to work out in detail exactly

what the relevant bone and muscle structure must be, and set to work immediately to reproduce it. An acrobat in a costume which covered only the primary and secondary characteristics showed Vee the entire bone structure of the feminine torso, and she made good use of the information.

Certain details would have to wait, of course. A visit to a library—once she could read—would probably fill in most of the gaps left by television.

Meantime she had enough to do learning the language and customs of these creatures and modifying her body. She would look and sound like a human female long before she really was one.

At night, when most transmissions ceased, she turned to another problem—where her ship had landed, and what she was to use for food.

In accordance with standard practice, the lifeboat had buried itself in soft ground and pulled the hole in after itself. Digging her way to the surface—though her transformation had begun, she was still well equipped for digging—Vee found to her delighted amazement that she was right in the middle of the richest larder imaginable, covered by it, hidden by it. She could eat almost every form of vegetation, and she was in thick undergrowth which already

had swung back to conceal the passage of her tiny ship.

Collecting enough leaves to last her for several days, she returned to her ship, reflecting that the only food difficulties were going to be when she was nearly human and could no longer live on leaves, and would need much more air than she normally required.

However, that wouldn't be for some days yet.

**N**EXT day, when radio transmission started, she was again busy.

Vigintans, like humans, had enormously high potential when all their interests were at stake. Under the stress of dire necessity, a man who isn't particularly brave, skillful or intelligent will often do things which are well beyond his normal capacity. Vee, likewise, was able to employ several times her normal capacity in learning from radio and TV, making the necessary deductions and applying the results.

The finer points of the psychology of these humans were beyond her and might always be. But on the whole they were decent enough people, and, after all, among all civilized races the fundamental principle of cooperation was the same—I'll do what you want if you do what I want.

In fact, these humans even put it in the form of a maxim:

*You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.*

No, Vee didn't anticipate any real trouble in dealing with them and getting what she wanted.

What she *needed*.

AS WALT came out into the street, he heard his name called. He turned before he realized it would have been much more sensible to pay no attention.

In the car by the curb was Janet.

"Look, Janet," he said. "I told you—"

"Do you have to go there?" she said bitterly. "Don't you know that if you've got to have a woman, I'm waiting?"

He straightened and would have walked on.

"I'll drive after you," she said, "calling your name. Get in and talk to me."

He hesitated, then got in beside her. Janet was showing far more guts and persistence and determination than he had ever believed her capable of—and he wished she wouldn't.

"Janet," he said, "I was right. I'm as good as dead. Why can't you just tell yourself I'm dead now?"

"Walt, I don't think you know what love is. What kind of a girl would walk out on her man when he needs her most?"

"I don't need you. If we'd been married, you'd have

stood by me. I know that. I'd have expected it. But it's crazy to go on when there's no future for us. Find some other guy. Do it now, instead of waiting till they actually screw the lid down on me."

"Until you find some other girl, I won't leave you."

"There isn't going to be any other girl. Why should I try to make somebody else miserable because I'm going to die? All I want is—"

"To make a martyr of yourself. To give up everything so that you die with nothing, with nobody caring about you, so that you can feel sorry for yourself and say, 'Look how cruel fate has been to me.'"

"It's not like that at all. I just want to tie up some loose ends."

"Walt, you're wrong, your whole attitude's wrong. The natural, the right thing for a man to do is begin new things till the day he dies."

"Let's not get started on that again, Janet."

"If you think it's wrong to come to me, what's so damned right about going to a woman like that?"

"I can't hurt her," said Walt patiently. "She's forgotten me already. It was just a business transaction."

"And knowing you're going to a place like that is supposed to make me wild with joy?"

"You're not supposed to know anything about me."



You're supposed to forget you ever knew me."

She was silent for a moment. Then she said: "I'll drive you home. I'm not strong really, Walt. I can't keep up an argument for long. I have to wait for a while before I have strength to start it again."

"Then why start it, honey?"

She began to cry quietly, helplessly. It took all Walt's self-control to stop himself from taking her in his arms, but he succeeded.

Presently, blinking hard, she started the motor and put the car in gear.

**I**T WAS three o'clock in the morning, and apart from the soft, rustling sounds of the country at night, all was still. But down in the forest something stirred.

It was an approximate girl who weighed 118 pounds, was five feet six inches tall, blonde, and 38, 23, 37.

It was Vee.

She had no intention of being seen by anyone this trip.

Apart from lack of clothes, she didn't expect to pass as a normal human female yet. One difficulty was color. Television didn't show whether her skin should be gray, pale yellow, blue, green or pink.

By the time she returned to her lifeboat, before dawn, she hoped to have clothing,

money, and most of the biological information she still lacked. She had no special advantages except her Vigintan warning instinct, which was better than the human variety. In addition to hearing, sight and smell, she had a kind of crude telepathy which enabled her to place accurately—even with her eyes closed—all living intelligences within two or three hundred yards.

The night was warm and strongly moonlit. Vee had chosen a moonlit night because her night vision was no better than any human's, and it was no good avoiding being seen by picking a night so dark that she couldn't see either.

She liked her human body, which was more mobile and nearly as tough as the one it had replaced. Clothes were a necessity, however, she soon discovered, shivering despite the exercise of walking. Shoes of some kind were even more necessary than clothes, for although grass did her tender soles no harm, stones and twigs underfoot hurt them and made her pick her route with care.

A dog came up to her silently. Masking her fear, she radiated strong reassurance.

To her relief, the dog was so completely satisfied that he lost interest, loping off as silently as he came. Vee was pleased as well as relieved.

She knew from radio and TV that dogs did a good deal of their investigation with their noses, and from the indifference of this dog it was obvious that her body scent must be normal. This wasn't surprising, since her metabolism was now entirely human, even if all the details were not quite settled. She was living on fruit, berries, nuts and vegetables.

It didn't bother the dog that she had no clothes on.

Presently she found a road by seeing the headlights of a car on it. A road must lead somewhere, and a few minutes of patient waiting satisfied her that it was safe to walk on it. If only one car passed in twenty minutes, it could hardly be a busy highway.

She walked a mile and saw no more vehicles, met no one. Another dog investigated her much as the first one had done. She saw several cats, but they ignored her completely.

**W**HEN she saw the lights of a town, she proceeded with more caution. The street lights were a nuisance. Although the town seemed dead, she didn't dare walk along the streets.

She crept behind the first house. Three people inside, all asleep. But the fourth house was empty.

Twenty minutes spent ex-

amining the doors and windows showed her the difficulty of her task. She had to steal clothes and money. Later she would return them somehow or other; the Vigintan moral code was strict in such matters. But with limited knowledge of the people from whom she was trying to steal, it seemed to be impossible to take anything without leaving too many clues.

A fingerprint on a window would be a clue. How much more significant it would be, she thought, to leave a fingerprint which wasn't quite a fingerprint...

In the end she had to take the chance of entering an occupied house. Empty houses were too well locked up. The house she chose had an open downstairs window.

There were two people in the house, both upstairs. Keeping her mental eye on them all the time, Vee went from room to room searching for clothes. She found only shoes which didn't fit her. Naturally enough, clothes would be kept in bedrooms.

After half an hour of fumbling in the dark, not daring to put on a light, Vee was getting desperate. Soon she'd have to start back to the lifeboat, and she had accomplished nothing yet.

She tried another house, knowing five people were asleep in it, two of them downstairs. It was a large

house. Her reasoning was that in such a house there was more chance of things being left around in more places.

In a room facing the back, she switched on the light. Caution had got her nowhere. She soon found that recklessness had brought a rich reward.

She was in a spare bedroom and all the drawers were filled with clothes, women's clothes.

Wasting no time, she dressed herself clumsily. Fortunately television plays not infrequently showed women dressing and undressing. She selected rather the clothes which might not be missed for a while than those which fitted best, although she guessed the chances of their being missed were remote.

There were no shoes. Dressed in a sweater and skirt, she searched in other rooms and finally found a pair of sandals which fitted fairly well.

Unlike anybody else in this world, she could make her feet fit the shoes, given time.

Leaving the house, she decided to call it a night. She was dressed after a fashion. She had no idea how she would look to a human, and had no intention of finding out immediately. Future forays would be necessary.

She started to walk back to her lifeboat.

**IT TOOK** Vee two weeks more before she was ready to risk meeting people. By the end of that time she felt very low, not having had any companionship for so long. Only the radio and television programs and hope had kept her going.

She had borrowed some medical books for a few hours. She had watched people from hiding. She had seen dead bodies at the local morgue.

And she had made herself completely human, apart from certain things which she didn't abandon because she couldn't—like the ability to change back to her own shape and to exist, if necessary, on vegetable matter which ordinary humans would not regard as food.

Naturally she had tried to make herself as attractive as possible. How far she had been successful, she had no means of knowing.

Money had remained a problem for a long time. If it was difficult to steal clothes, it was ten times as difficult to steal money. These humans—of whom she thought, now, as "people"—never seemed to leave money lying around. And if you did get your hands on money which wasn't yours, you were pretty sure to be caught.

For a while she considered letting herself be caught. She'd be put in jail and looked

after, become somebody else's responsibility. But she discarded the idea because that way she'd forfeit too many rights. Private citizens had a lot of rights in this country, though the radio sometimes suggested that this wasn't so everywhere. Unless you forfeited them by becoming a criminal, you could do pretty much what you liked here and nobody interfered with you.

Her long hours of watching and waiting around the village, which she now knew was called Slacksville, finally paid off.

A storekeeper ran out when there was an accident in the street, and Vee was able to rob the till. She felt miserable about it, but she knew she had no choice. Without money, you could get by if you knew enough to get and keep a job. With money, you might be able to learn enough to get a job.

She had a little over a hundred dollars, not much, but all she intended to steal.

Only fifty miles away, she knew now, was a city—not a big, important city, but many times larger than the tiny town which had unwillingly furnished her immediate needs.

She hid the lifeboat so completely that it might not be found in a hundred years. There was nothing to pack. In her stolen sweater and skirt, she walked ten miles in

the opposite direction from Slacksville, strolled casually into another small town, and waited to see what would happen.

Nothing happened. A middle-aged woman looked at her incuriously, a child gazed up at her, a youth of seventeen gave her the once-over. Nobody stared; nobody looked away quickly.

She had been successful, then, but not completely successful. She knew how boys of seventeen were supposed to react to the kind of girl she had tried to make herself, and this one conspicuously failed to do so. However, that was of less importance than the thing which had already been quite clearly established—she could pass among humans as one of them.

AT THE depot she bought a ticket to the city. It was the first time she had attempted human speech. The only reaction she could observe was indifference.

It was the same on the train. Although glad that she had been so successful in her primary purpose, Vee was conscious of pique too. In her own world she had never been so disregarded. Her feminine reaction was that it would be better to be downright ugly than anonymous.

A girl in white was coming along through the car. There was a stir. Vee began to un-



derstand why nobody looked twice at her.

The girl was cleaner than a new nickel and shone as brightly. Every dark hair was in place. Her pink blush was not natural, nor were her lush dark-red lips, but there was nothing natural about this white, shiny, immaculate creature. Her high breasts were molded by nylon and elastic, her flat stomach was under rigid, unseen control, her skin was a labor of chemical love.

Television hadn't shown such detail. Vee still had a lot to learn. She was merely a girl in an old sweater and skirt that was new but only fitted more or less.

When she reached the city, she shut her eyes to its complexity, its wonder. Later she would look at it. First she needed a place to stay.

She found one easily enough, going through the routine she had seen on television: girl-arrives-in-city-finds-apartment.

She told the myopic landlady, Mrs. Decker, that she had left her luggage at the station until she found a room. Mrs. Decker was satisfied.

As Vee came out of her room, intending to go out again and take a look at the immediate neighborhood of 179 Buckwash Street, a tall, good-looking young man came out of the next room. He had black hair and rather pale

skin, as if he spent a lot of time indoors.

Vee smiled at him, and he smiled back. He nearly said something, but then he cleared his throat unnecessarily, looked away and popped back into his room like a startled rabbit.

Vee didn't recognize shyness. She thought he just wasn't interested in a girl as mediocre in appearance as she was.

Since she hadn't managed to make herself into the kind of glamour girl who, in television at any rate, was always surrounded by attentive, admiring males, it was obviously useless just to wait for a soulmate to come along. She'd have to go find one.

**W**ALT saw Janet's car half a block away. "Damn," he said under his breath. She knew all the places he was likely to go—half a dozen times now, she had trapped him and they had played out half-bitter, half-tender scenes in no essential respect different from the first.

This time she hadn't seen him. He cut through the park. Let her wait—if she missed him often enough, maybe she'd give up and go away.

He was tired of fighting Janet and knew that his resistance wouldn't last much longer—although he still passionately believed he was right. Why couldn't she see

what was so clear to him, that if he thought only of himself, he wouldn't do this? It was for Janet's sake that he was trying to break with her.

Finding himself at the entrance to Bill McEwan's office, Walt went in. He was supposed to keep in touch.

McEwan was professionally hearty, and Walt decided not to call on him again. As McEwan had already admitted, he could do nothing. All he had left was his bedside manner.

As Walt was leaving, McEwan said: "Girl came in this morning asking if I could put her in touch with people like you. Said she belonged to some organization I'd never heard of, but it sounds good.

"You didn't give her my name, did you?"

"No, but I thought it might interest you."

Walt frowned at him. "Why should you think that?"

"You might like to meet this girl," McEwan said.

Shrugging, Walt took a note of her address: 179 Buckwash Street.

Outside, he barely missed running into Janet again. She had moved her car.

Exasperated, he hoped that the Friends of People with a Year to Live, or whatever they called themselves, might be able to help him to get rid of Janet. He headed toward 179 Buckwash Street.

"Miss Vee Brown?" said

the myopic landlady. "Yeah, she's in. Working in the basement. You a chemist too?"

"In the *basement*?" Walt said.

"Yeah, she rents it."

Walt went down the stone steps. He found a blonde in a white smock working at a lab bench.

She was quite pretty. Cold, somehow, he thought.

As she came toward him, wiping her hands, he said: "I'm Walt Rinker. Dr. McEwan said you'd been to see him this morning..."

He left it like that, so that she'd have to do the talking.

She nodded coolly. "You're a patient of his, Mr. Rinker?"

"Yes."

"You have an incurable disease?"

"Yes."

"Cancer?"

"Leukemia."

"Mr. Rinker, this isn't a comfortable place to talk and I can't take you up to my apartment. Would you have coffee with me in the diner next door?"

"Look," he said. "This is kind of silly. I came along just out of curiosity. Frankly, I came because I wondered about you."

"About me?"

"It was a fool thing to do. I don't need any help, I've got plenty of money, my mind isn't going to collapse under the strain. Sorry to have bothered you, Miss Brown."

"You mean you want to go now?"

For the first time he sensed emotion in her. And it was emotion of startling intensity. He began to think she was a nut, the kind of eccentric who felt she had a mission.

As he was about to turn and go up the steps again, being as rude as might be necessary to get away from her, she took off her lab smock and said quietly: "Well, it won't hurt to talk here for half an hour."

"No, I guess not," he said. They sat down.

VEE hadn't found it hard to make money after all. From television and radio she had learned that although fortunes could be made at race tracks with very little outlay, betting on horses was generally considered a gamble.

Still, she had visited a race track to confirm this view of the matter. And she had found that, for her, betting on horses wasn't foolish at all.

You could see the runners, that was the point. And Vee, with the trained eye of a species which could change its own physical structure at will, could establish an awful lot from seeing the runners. She could not merely tell the best, strongest fastest horses; far more important, she could form a pretty good impression of the probable winners.

There were failures, of

course. At first she didn't properly understand the mathematics of this particular form of betting. Even when she did, the horse which should have won didn't always win. And when the probable winner was short-priced, a bet in the small sums she could spare was neither economically sound nor particularly productive.

But she wasn't compelled to bet on short-priced horses. And the advantage of her special sense was that when a long shot was going to come up, Vee was the only one at the course who knew it beforehand.

She soon had enough money for her immediate needs. The first thing she did was buy some clothes.

She had discovered, meantime, one of the peculiarities of this society. If you were willing to be labeled a crank, you could get away with practically anything.

Walt Rinker wasn't the first person who had come to see her. There had been three hypochondriacs and two cancer cases too far gone for her to do anything for them.

She didn't know yet whether she could do anything for Walter, but he was the first to interest her personally.

She decided, at the end of the half-hour, that he was to be her soulmate.

As they emerged from the

basement, she stopped at the foot of the stairs.

"I have to go upstairs for a moment," she said. "You'll wait?"

"Sure."

She hesitated for a moment longer. Now that he had seen her, he might make his escape thankfully. However, she couldn't handcuff him to her—yet.

Running lightly up to her apartment, she once again passed Billy Clark, the tall, good-looking boy in the next room.

"Miss Brown," he said, putting out his hand as if to stop her.

"Yes?" she said. She tried not to betray her impatience, but her hand came up to open her door. The sooner she got back to Walt, the less chance there would be of finding him gone.

"Nothing," he muttered. "Some other time."

Vee went in, unlocked the middle drawer of the dressing table and took out a small package. She would have liked to change into something more glamorous than the indeterminate blue dress she was wearing, but didn't want to take the risk that Walt would walk out on her. Putting the package in her handbag, she turned and went out again.

To her surprise, Billy Clark was still waiting outside. She smiled at him automatically.

He opened his mouth to speak, but before anything came out, she was halfway down the stairs.

It was a relief to find that Walt had not gone away.

**D**RINKING coffee in an alcove, Walt was still sorry he had come. Vee Brown was, of course, a nut. The trouble was that she wasn't even an interesting nut. She talked characterlessly, like the people in bad scripts who said merely what the plot required them to say.

She asked him quite a few questions which he answered truthfully but briefly.

"How about me asking something for a change?" he said. "Just what is all this about?"

She looked at him steadily. "Mr. Rinker, are you prepared to try out an experimental cure for leukemia?"

Walt was suddenly angry. "Think I'm crazy? There's no cure."

"Then you lose nothing."

"And gain nothing."

She shook her head. "That's not true. If my method doesn't cure you, at least it will give you longer to live."

He was still angry. "Who do you think you're fooling? If there was a cure, every newspaper in the world would be carrying the story."

"Not if they didn't know about it. And nobody does."

"A thing like this would be



known about long before it happened. People don't discover things by accident any more."

"Don't they? Offhand, I seem to remember reading that isoniazid, the TB drug, was a byproduct of rocket research. Besides, did I say this cure was discovered by accident?"

"There isn't a cure!" he almost shouted, trembling.

Not until this girl claimed to be able to cure him had he realized how much he wanted to live.

You were told you had leukemia and were going to die. It was like the moment after an injury when somehow you didn't lose consciousness. There was no pain yet, only numbness.

And mercifully the numbness went on. There was no argument with cancer or leukemia. You might live longer than they said, or not as long, but you were under sentence.

With tuberculosis, meningitis, tumors, almost anything else, there was a chance. With leukemia, death wasn't a matter of *if*; it was a matter of *when*.

And that maintained the numbness, the numbness out of which Walt had been able to withstand the pleas of Janet, knowing he was right.

Now, irresponsibly, this woman made him face the thought of being cured, the

thought of being able to go to Janet and say . . .

As he stared down at Vee, it suddenly seemed to him that he had never known anybody who looked less crazy. Cold she was, apart from that moment in the basement when for a moment her feelings had broken through, but it was the coldness of a girl who was under strict, almost unnatural self-control.

If a girl of twenty-five or so did happen to have a cure for leukemia, she might be like this girl, act like this girl.

He sat down, still not believing in Vee, still hating her.

Vee felt his hatred and failed to understand it. She was bewildered and frightened. This was the man she had chosen as her soulmate, unless he had any really serious defect of temperament. It was a simple bargain—she would give him life and he would be hers. Other women in his life, whether he was married or not, didn't matter. The other women couldn't save him; Vee could.

Surely any reasonable creature, human or otherwise, would accept life with her as an alternative to death. If for no other reason, gratitude would compel Walt to do as she wished.

"Why do you hate me?" she asked steadily.

"You've made me hope," he said. "I know you're a sensation-seeking nut. But you've

made me think what it would be like not to die."

Vee felt better. She could understand that. "I know."

"Tell me about this cure of yours. How does it work? Convince me."

"You don't have to be convinced. It works whether you understand it or not, like serum or antibiotics."

Damn it, was there ever such inhuman self-control? She didn't even seem to feel the need to justify herself.

"Tell me about it all the same," he said furiously.

Vee considered. Could she tell him about the restorer?

ON VEE's world, evolution had demanded the ability to change one's physical shape. Back in the savage days, long before the first stirrings of civilization, the way to survive had been periodic metamorphosis. The briffs, the keymors, all the different types of mally, each in turn had ruled the world—physically. Mentally, Vee's race had always been supreme. But Vee's race (which never had a name of its own, for its members *called* themselves and *were* the creatures they happened to be duplicating at the time) was not warlike. Unable to survive by fighting, they had survived by *being* their enemies.

Later, much later, the other races of the Vigintan worlds so objected to this habit that

Vee's race signed an agreement never to imitate any of the Vigintan species. Although this promise was scrupulously kept, Vee and her people could no more lose the faculty of metamorphosis than a man with ears among deaf people could forget how to hear.

A human male with this faculty might retain his human shape, but he would make himself tall, strong and handsome. A human female would make herself independent of aids to beauty, as Vee had done, merely by making muscles of the necessary tone and strength.

Members of Vee's race died, usually, of disease peculiar to the kind of creature they happened to be emulating. They were particularly susceptible, for they made themselves, in effect, into pure, perfect, exact, immaculate specimens—without, of course, even the slightest experience of any of the relevant diseases. Once ill, changing again didn't help. In effect, they took the disease with them.

When technology began, however, the restorer was developed. And hardly anyone ever died any more except in accidents or of extreme old age.

The restorer was a tiny object manufactured from bodily secretions. In a sense, it was alive. It was certainly organic. Yet it was only a

pattern—a pattern of the kind of life-form the creature who secreted it was imitating. It was the essence of the species, so basic that it would be the same for Asiatic, Negro or Occidental, man or woman, child or oldster.

On becoming ill, you swallowed the restorer—part natural, part artificial. It spread in the blood to brain, heart, lungs. And the whole physical effort of the body was directed to the restoration of the natural pattern—normal good health.

When the other Vigintan races discovered that the restorer worked for them too, Vee's people suddenly became exceedingly popular, and their peculiar gift, hitherto regarded with suspicion at least, made them everybody's friend.

That was all very well in the Vigintan worlds, but Vee could hardly explain any of this to Walt.

"No," she said. She took a small pill from her handbag. "Swallow that without chewing it and your cure begins."

He took it and looked at it—an ordinary white pill. Once again he felt anger and frustration rise in him. A little white pill like that couldn't do any good.

He looked up at Vee. "What do you get out of this whole business?"

"Nothing at the moment."

"At the moment? And later?"

"I am not after money," she said firmly.

Confused, suspicious, Walt put the pill in his mouth and swallowed it.

Barring accidents, he was cured now. Although the process of cure had barely started, it was complete. He needed nothing more. But Vee didn't propose to tell him that yet.

"You're a chemist?" Walt said uncertainly.

She nodded.

He wanted to believe in her, was afraid to believe in her. "Did you work for any of the big firms?"

She smiled. "Go home. Come back here the night after next."

"Go home?"

She stood up. "In about an hour you'll feel lightheaded," she said. "It won't be unpleasant and you'll be all right if you lie down. The less you do tomorrow, the better. If you get up, stay in a chair all day. You'll probably be hungry. Eat anything you like. Come back the following night."

Maintaining her incredible composure to the end, she walked out. Walt went to the desk to pay the bill, but she had even done that.

**V**EE SPENT the next day at the race track winning carefully, not spectacularly. Some day she would have to arrange an entirely

honest income. She didn't consider betting on horses honest for her, any more than it would be honest for her to bet on the number of peas in a bottle when she knew the answer.

She had already sent money anonymously to various addresses in Slacksville. Eventually she intended to return her winnings by the simple means of making losing bets to the right bookmakers.

Vigintan morality was different from human morality. There was no arguing with it.

On the morning of the day Walt was to call, she rented a large but discreet apartment in a different part of the city, and spent the rest of the day putting it in order.

In the evening she returned to 179 Buckwash Street, and when Walt called, she took him out immediately and directed a taxi driver to take them to the new apartment.

"Where are we going?" Walt demanded.

"Wait and see."

"Miss Brown, I—"

"You might as well call me Vee."

She was as cool as ever, but twice as pretty as he remembered. In fact, she was an astonishingly beautiful girl—astonishing because, although she was undoubtedly the same girl, she hadn't left him with that impression before. If only she acted like—well, not necessarily like Janet, but like

any other girl, with likes and dislikes, a sense of humor, perhaps, not just that same cool, impersonal manner all the time—she could be a remarkably attractive woman. Not that that was anything to him, of course.

"Vee," he said, "I don't know what's been happening to me, but something has. I feel—I feel as if there's a fire in my body, but a soothing fire. Vee, tell me the truth. Am I really getting better?"

"You should be," she said.

"And that's all there is to it—taking a pill?"

That was all there was to it, but Vee had far too slight a hold on him so far to tell him that. The interval of forty-eight hours had been carefully calculated. She wanted him to believe that he was being cured, not that he was already cured.

"Pills," she amended.

"For how long?"

"It depends. When you're cured, you can stop taking pills."

"But . . . Vee . . . How come, if this works as you say, nobody knows about it? Why don't you shout it from the rooftops?"

"Walt, I want you to promise me not to tell anybody what's happening to you meantime. When I do release it, I want to know exactly what it is and what it will do."

"Sure, but every day people

are dying who might be—"

"Walt, I promise you that the treatment will be made available to everybody when I know how to handle it. In fact, you'll help me, won't you?"

He didn't get a chance to answer, for the cab had drawn up and Vee was getting out.

The apartment stupefied him. As he looked at its pastel shades with the occasional splashes of saturated color, his eyes narrowed thoughtfully and he turned presently to look at Vee with a certain speculation which had been absent from his gaze so far.

With her near-telepathic sense, she realized at once that though she personally had not struck him as strange enough for any suspicion of the truth about her origin to cross his mind, she had overreached herself in the decoration of the apartment—although it had been done rapidly and sketchily with furniture obtainable from stock, and although much had been left as she had found it. From the moment when she had first seen an image form in the screen in her lifeboat, she had been concentrating on modeling herself on the kind of human female whom human males liked. She had devoted only a passing glance to the kind of décor they were accustomed to.

"Do you like it?" she said. "I'm going to have the walls

green, but the ceiling and lighting could stay, don't you think?"

His vague, formless suspicion dissolved and was washed away. But he asked: "Why do you have two apartments?"

She shrugged. "This is where I'm going to live. The other is rented till the end of the week. Would you like a drink?"

He hesitated. Although he had dismissed from his mind the curious first impression that the room had had on him, the strangeness of this woman and her behavior and the effect of the pill she had given him made him uneasy.

"Why did you bring me here?" he asked.

Vee was uneasy too. He just didn't react the way he was supposed to. She had changed her dress and appearance slightly, subtly, and had sensed at first that she was making a better impression on him than on their first meeting.

"I want to make some tests," she said.

"Then hadn't you better do that before you offer me a drink?"

"I guess so, yes."

The undercurrent felt wrong. She would have to try something, anything. "What do you think of me?" she asked abruptly.

"You're a strange girl."

The words told her something, but not as much as

what accompanied them did. *You're cold. You smile, but you don't laugh. I just don't know what makes you tick.*

"Wait here a minute," she said, and went through to her bedroom, closing the door behind her.

**S**HE COULD abandon Walt and find someone else. Love, for members of Vee's race, was less capricious than among humans. They found possible soulmates—which was easy, with their near-telepathy—and gradually, progressively, loved them. There were no second thoughts.

Already Vee felt too much for Walt to be willing to tear herself from him and start anew. But she could do it. She could do it now. With every hour she spent with him, it got tougher. Soon it would be impossible.

She made up her mind, shrugging away her doubts. If she failed with Walt, why should she succeed with any other human male?

Her present tactics were wrong, that was all. She remembered a television play about a girl scientist. Men thought her a washout when she wore glasses and a lab smock. But she was a wow when her hair came loose, and she got a little drunk, and the plot somehow got her into a bathing suit.

Vee would start again—remembering that her excuse

for keeping Walt here was the necessity of making tests of one sort or another.

Walt looked up as she emerged with a syringe.

"I want samples of your blood," she said. "I'm going to take a count in one hour, two hours, and three hours."

"Mean you want me to stay for three hours?"

"I'd have you stay all night, only I don't want you claiming I raped you."

She giggled at his expression. But she drew off the blood sample competently, except that a drop fell on her skirt.

"Slob," she said. "Why don't you watch where you're bleeding?"

"What are you going to do with that blood?" Walt asked.

"Get it off if I can."

"I don't mean on your skirt. What are you going to do with the sample?"

"Drink it, of course."

She went back in the other room. A moment later she put her head out the door. "Walt, make yourself useful. The bathroom's through there. See if you can get this clean."

She threw something at him which proved to be her skirt.

When she came back in five minutes, she was wearing a short wrap which showed she had exceedingly beautiful legs. "Don't stare at me as if I weren't wearing anything underneath," she said. "I am. Look."

She flicked her wrap and Walt saw she was wearing white panties. At the same time he saw she wasn't wearing anything else.

"Look, Vee," he said. "We might as well get one thing clear now, in case there's any misunderstanding. I've got a girl, Janet. We'd be married except that I wouldn't get married with this hanging over me. If I do get better, it's Janet for me. Is that clear?"

"Sure," said Vee. "I understand English real good."

Walt persisted. "I mean Janet's the only girl for me. When I thought I was going to die, I tried to brush her off. But if I don't die—well, there's going to be nobody else but Janet."

About that, Vee thought, there may be two opinions.

"Have a drink," Vee said.

She got inside the skin of the character she had adopted. She was frank, outspoken, warmly sexy, inviting. And Walt had a good time with her. She laughed easily and he wondered dazedly why he'd ever thought she was cold and stiff.

After an hour, she left him for a few minutes. Returning, she gave him another small white pill.

"Walt," she said solemnly, "I think you're going to be all right. I'll check again later, but I can tell you now—keep up the treatment and your

worries are over. Let's have a drink to celebrate."

They had a drink to celebrate. They had several drinks.

And eventually, despite his excellent resolutions, the alcohol and the proximity of Vee and the sure knowledge that she was ready and willing broke down his resistance.

At first he merely had an irresistible impulse to fold back the collar of her wrap. Finding himself practically kissing her, he did kiss her.

Vee was sure enough of herself and him to whisper mockingly: "Remember Janet, Walt."

"The hell with Janet," he said hoarsely.

**B**UT THE next day things looked different to him. Wakening about eleven o'clock, Walt lost no time in getting dressed, hardly looking at Vee.

Despite the hard drinking they'd been doing, he felt better than he had for months. There remained no doubt in his mind that he was going to be well again.

And it suddenly became a matter of desperate urgency to see Janet.

"Tonight again, Walt," Vee said before he left.

"How long do I have to keep taking pills?"

"Every night."

"Can't you give me them now?"

"No. I've got to keep checking results."

He shrugged. Her methods might be peculiar, but apparently they worked. He felt the need to say something more, feeling the awkwardness that a man always feels when something has happened which the girl takes much more seriously than he does.

"Vee, I—"

"Don't talk now," she said. "The morning's no time for talking. Tell me one thing, though—do you like my dress?"

He couldn't help grinning. She wasn't wearing a dress.

**H**E hurried out, took a cab and waited impatiently at the Kentucky House, where Janet generally lunched. For weeks Janet had been chasing him relentlessly, begging, pleading, crying, arguing, demanding, insisting. The last time they had had a scene had been just before he met Vee. With his mind he knew there was no chance that Janet had suddenly changed, yet in his heart he was terribly afraid that just at the moment when he had decided with infinite gladness that he could marry her after all, she had decided to take him at his word and never see him again.

As the minutes passed and she didn't come, he cursed himself for being so definite. Yet how could he have known

that a miracle was going to happen? Short of a miracle, he had meant all he said to Janet. But if only he hadn't been quite so hard, quite so certain . . .

The food in front of him didn't interest him at first. He'd been pecking at his meals for months, and despite what Vee had said, he hadn't been particularly hungry the day before. However, when he started pecking as usual, he ate everything in sight, ordered more, and finally stopped eating only because he didn't believe it could be right to go on eating until he burst.

Besides, there was Janet. She didn't come in to lunch. After his enormous meal, he went to her home. Her mother, surprised and doubtful at sight of him, said no, she wasn't home, no, she wasn't out of town, yes, she'd be home around eight.

"Tell her to phone me when she comes in," said Walt. He gave Vee's number, for he'd be at her apartment at eight.

It would be just as well, he decided, to make things quite clear. He'd tell Vee he expected Janet to call, and she could listen to him talking to Janet.

Maybe that was cruel to Vee, to whom he owed his life. Maybe he shouldn't have arranged things that way. But he had already told Vee about Janet, and the sooner she knew he meant what he said, the better.



**W**HEN he arrived at her apartment that night, she was already in a wrap, a long white negligee this time, and he was glad he had left a message for Janet to phone him here.

"Look, Vee," he said abruptly, "you were very sweet last night. But I told you I was going to marry Janet, and I meant it. You understood that, didn't you?"

"If we're going to have a stand-up fight," said Vee pleasantly, "let's at least sit down first."

He sat as far away from her as he could.

"I shouldn't have stayed here last night," he said. "Because I knew at the time that to you it was more than . . . I mean we'd only just met, and yet somehow I knew that you—"

"That I meant to marry you," said Vee.

Her calm certainty startled him. "Well—yes. But I told you about Janet, Vee. I meant it."

"So that made it all right to sleep with me."

"Vee, Janet's going to phone me here. I'm going to tell her that I'm asking her to marry me again."

"How often have you been married to her?"

"You know what I mean, damn it."

Vee crossed her legs and lay back. "If there's going to be straight talking," she said,

"you can have the last word. I want the first."

"If there's going to be straight talking," Walt said, "pull that wrap over your legs and shut it at the top. I'm not made of wood."

"No," said Vee mildly, "I know that, Walt."

She left her wrap the way it was.

"Correct me if I'm wrong," she said. "When you were going to die, you weren't going to marry Janet. Now that you're going to live, you want her back."

"That's right."

"I'm sorry, Walt. Under those conditions, you don't get better."

He caught his breath. "What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say. It's a simple bargain, Walt. Marry me and I'll cure you. Marry Janet and you die."

He was staring at her in horror. "You're crazy!"

"Not at all. I didn't mean to put it so bluntly so soon, Walt. I wanted to help you forget Janet and perhaps never have to deliver an ultimatum. But you've forced me to."

He shook his head incredulously. She was as calm, as businesslike as she had been earlier in their acquaintance. But for Janet, he might have loved the other Vee, the warmer, exciting Vee. This one he didn't like, Janet or no Janet.

In the silence, the phone rang.

**H** E GOT up to answer it. Vee got up too. As if aware of what he had just been thinking, she was laughing, playful. She barred his way.

"I'm going to speak to Janet," he said.

"You said yourself you wouldn't marry her unless you recovered. And if you marry her, you don't recover. So why speak to her?"

He tried to get past her. She dodged in front of him again. Grasping her firmly, he tried to push her to one side. But he was still not a well man and she was as strong as he was. He pulled at her shoulder and her wrap tore and hung to the swell of her hip at one side. She only laughed.

The bell was still ringing. Furious, he aimed a vicious blow at Vee. She caught his arm and they both fell to the floor.

"If your Janet could see you now," she giggled breathlessly, "there would certainly be no wedding."

Having gained the superior position, he tried to get up. Vee held his leg and though he kicked savagely, he couldn't get free.

The bell stopped ringing. At once Vee let go. Walt dived to the phone and picked it up. "Janet? Janet? This is Walt. Janet?"

Silence.

He slammed the phone down. Vee was getting to her

feet. "I could kill you!" he said.

"I doubt it."

He picked up the phone again and started to dial. Vee moved behind him, and as he finished dialing, she mischievously presented him with the cut end of the phone cable.

Without thinking, he chopped at her with his fist. She went down in a heap at his feet.

At once he was sorry, and picked her up. He carried her to the couch and was laying her gently on it when she opened her eyes and said conversationally: "This is nice."

He dropped her angrily.

She sat up. "Walt, when you think about it, it isn't such a bad bargain. Would you honestly really rather die than marry me?"

"I don't get it," he said bitterly. "You're young and you're anything but ugly. Why does it have to be me?"

"Because . . ." But she wasn't going to tell him it was because Billy Clark, when he had first seen her, had merely looked at her, smiled automatically and dived into his room. Because she had to have a soulmate, and soon. Because, for all her efforts, men didn't go mad at sight of her, and even after what had happened between her and Walt, he wanted to cast her aside and marry his Janet.

Because she had to be able to keep her man with her, and

if she couldn't do it without a leash and a collar, there had to be a leash and collar.

Because if she didn't have a soulmate she would die.

If Walt only knew it, she had no hold over him. The pill she would give him soon looked like the restorer she had given him that first night, but it was nothing, did nothing. She had already done all she could for him.

"Don't you owe me something, Walt?" she said.

"I don't owe you the rest of my life."

"Don't you?"

"Look, Vee, let's look at this calmly. I can't marry you and you wouldn't want me to, knowing I love Janet."

"You won't go on loving Janet."

"I will."

"You won't."

**S**HE was certain of that. Given a chance, she could mold herself to Walt so completely that he would talk of Janet shamefacedly as "a girl I used to know." Given time, Vee and Walt could be as close as any human couple in the world. She was in no doubt about that. Only she had to be given the chance, given time.

Walt tried again. "Vee, I thought at first you were pretty cold, but I don't now. You're a woman."

"Thanks, Walt. I always wondered about that."

"If you really believed, real-

ly *knew* you couldn't have me, you wouldn't condemn me to death. I know that."

Vee knew it too. Sooner or later she'd have to give the restorer to everybody; certainly she couldn't let Walt die, even if she lost him. It was unfortunate that he guessed that.

"Oh, you'd be surprised how callous I can be," she said lightly.

They talked it back and forth, sometimes calmly, sometimes angrily. Vee didn't shift her ground.

When the door chimes sounded and Vee went to open the door, Walt didn't move. It didn't seem to be anything to him that somebody was calling on Vee.

It was only when Janet came in, white and rigid, and he saw Vee's mocking smile, that he realized that Vee had known all along who it would be.

"So this is what you wanted to tell me," said Janet. Neatly dressed in a blue wool suit, she looked almost boyish beside the flamboyant Vee, her wrap torn down one side to her rounded hips.

"You must be Janet," Vee said. "I'm sure you'd like a drink."

"Janet, I want to marry you," Walt said.

Janet didn't look at Vee. "Once I said I wouldn't leave you until you found some other girl. Now you have."



"I haven't . . . Listen, Janet, Vee is a chemist. She has a treatment—I'm not going to die."

*Yes you are, if you marry her.* That was on the tip of Vee's tongue, but she stopped herself in time and didn't say it. The effect would be to put Janet on Walt's side against her.

There were tears in Janet's voice. "Walt, honey, I told you

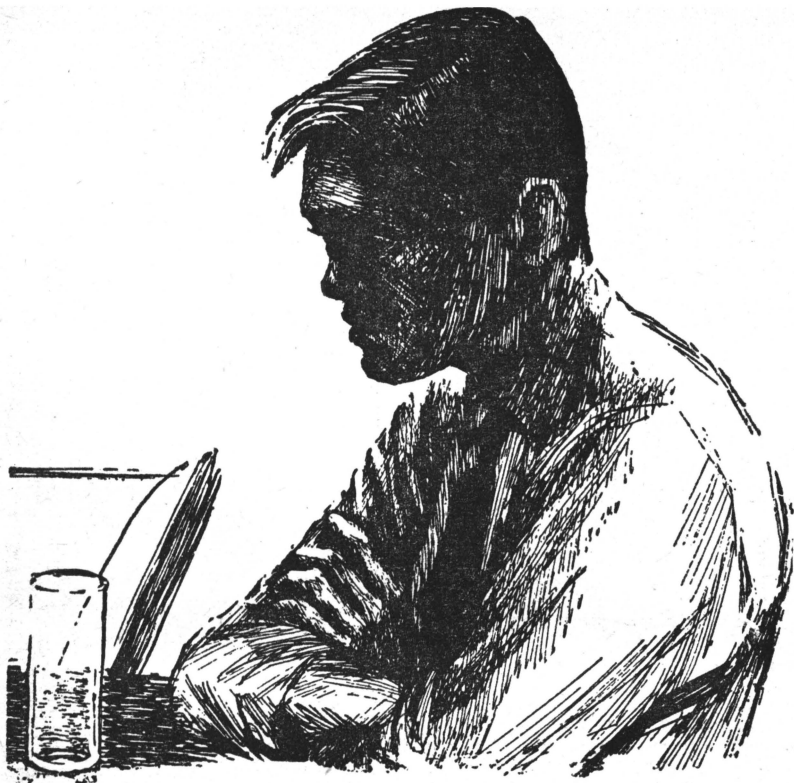
all along if you wanted a girl I was waiting."

"Janet, I don't love Vee. Please believe that."

"It's true," said Vee. "He beats me all the time."

"She's damnably clever, Janet," Walt said. "Everything she'll say will be meant to turn you against me. She wants to marry me."

"I didn't know I was at the end of a line of girls all want-



ing to marry you," Janet whispered. "I thought you were all mine, Walt. I thought you needed me."

Vee laughed.

Like an animal at bay, Walt looked wildly around him. And suddenly he pounced. "Look!" he shouted. "When you phoned earlier, she wouldn't let me answer. And then she cut the cord. See?"

"What does that prove?" Janet asked doubtfully.

"It shows I was trying to talk to you, and she was trying to stop me."

The atmosphere changed.

**V**EE was more desperate than Walt, although she didn't show it. She was fighting, literally, for her life. Having feelings, she was sorry for Janet. But if Janet

lost Walt, she wouldn't die. Janet was young and pretty, and within three months Janet would have another man crazy about her.

In three months Vee could perhaps have a man crazy about her too, only Vee couldn't wait three months. Without a soulmate, she was on the point of perishing now. She couldn't afford to lose Walt.

"Have a drink, Janet," she said.

"How long have you known her?" Janet demanded.

"Three days," said Walt.

"Three nights," Vee murmured.

Walt spun on her. "For Pete's sake, go put something on, Vee!"

"All right," she said mildly, knowing Walt didn't expect that.

AS she left them together, Vee was aware that if they had the sense to walk out together, she had lost. She banked on Janet being slow to forgive.

When the door closed behind her, Walt said rapidly: "Janet, she can cure me. Believe that. But now she's blackmailing me. Either I marry her or there won't be any cure."

"I don't understand any part of this," Janet said wearily, "except that you and she are lovers."

Walt should have had an

answer ready. Silence was worse than anything he might have said.

"So its true," she whispered.

"Janet, I'm only flesh and blood, and she—"

"I'm only flesh and blood too. What was wrong with me?"

"If you'll only let me explain—"

Vee came back, cool and elegant in a white dress. Janet looked at her and Vee's fabulous figure made her jealous and unsure. Part of her said, "It's only natural that Walt should forget himself with a girl like that. Forgive him." The rest of her said, "If only Vee had been ugly, I wouldn't have minded so much."

Janet wasn't conceited, wasn't sure of herself. When her rival was a girl like Vee, what chance had she?

"Have a drink, Janet," Vee said.

"Is that how it was?" Janet asked Walt bitterly. "You were drunk?"

"She made me stay. There were tests. Some blood got on her skirt."

"So naturally she took it off. Any girl would. And you . . . you and she . . ."

Janet was well brought up. She could think things, but she couldn't say them.

"Janet, you're a nice girl," Vee said. "I don't think you quite understand Walt."

"That's right. I don't. Obviously I never did."

"Janet, will you listen?" Walt begged. "Vee said she could cure me. I had nothing to lose. I tried her way. And it works. Already I feel so much better that today I went to the Kentucky House to look for you, to ask you to marry me. But you didn't come."

"So you came here instead. And left a message for me to phone you here."

"Don't you care that now I may live?"

"With her. You can live with Vee. She can keep you going. You need her. You never needed me."

"Janet, I'm telling you—I'm not going to die."

"If you can only live with her, I don't care if you *do* die!" Janet said crying. As usual, she could keep her end up so long, no longer. She turned blindly toward the door.

And Vee made her first mistake. "That's all she cares, Walt," she said. "As far as she's concerned, you can die right now."

Janet spun around, finding more courage from somewhere. "No," she said brokenly. "No, I was wrong. If she can really cure you, Walt, stay with her. I can't do anything for you. I never could, could I?"

Vee laughed with sudden joy.

She thought she had won. But she had lost.

**J**ANET was in Walt's arms and her tears weren't entirely tears of grief. Vee felt their love for each other, a bond that shut her out, a reconciliation which had nothing to do with facts or explanations.

"I need more treatment, honey," Walt said. "She says I don't get it unless I marry her."

Vee tried the old, unanswerable, logical argument again. "With Janet, you die. And you won't marry Janet unless you live. You'd decided that before you ever heard of me. What's changed?"

"Janet, you were right and I was wrong," Walt said softly. "Vee showed me that. I'd rather go with you, and die, than with her and live."

Vee's shoulders slumped and her figure suddenly wasn't fabulous any more.

It was physical, mental and spiritual, this need of her race to have a soulmate. In the end it would be physically that she would die, but not until the two other sides of her had already disintegrated.

She could hold out so long, as a man could hold out so long without food or water, getting weaker all the time. But since the mental part was so important, dissolution could be rapid.

It wasn't selfish, the love of

Vee's race. It had to go out and come back. From Walt it had never really come back—yet with the confidence that it soon would, Vee had been able to carry on. The moment she knew, however, knew with complete certainty that Walt was not for her, she felt all the staggering weight of all these lonely weeks, empty of everything but hope.

She couldn't fight any more. She could hardly speak.

"Go away, both of you," she said weakly. "Walt, you won't die. You don't need any more treatment."

Janet emerged from Walt's arms, blinking, to stare at Vee in dawning realization. "You did love him," she murmured. "You really do love him."

"Go away," Vee said, dropping loosely in a chair.

"Are you all right, Vee?" Walt said, suddenly solicitous. It seemed incredible that only a few minutes before Vee had been dominating the situation, and they had both hated and feared her.

"Yes. Go away. You'll be all right, Walt."

They didn't press their luck. They almost tiptoed out, arms around each other.

For a long time Vee didn't move. But even in her despair she hadn't quite lost her instinct for self-preservation, the unthinking urge to make one last try. And it would be the last one.

Others like Walt might have called at 179 Buckwash Street and left their addresses. If everything went right, if she found the right one that night, she still wouldn't be finished. She had to find reason to hope again within the next few hours. Failing that, she wouldn't wait for lingering physical death.

She dragged herself to her feet, went into the bedroom and changed into the first street dress she could find. Too tired to switch off the lights, she left them burning as she went out.

"You ill, lady?" the cabbie asked her.

"Just tired," she said.

**T**HE cab didn't leave until she had climbed the steps at Buckwash Street. The taxi driver wasn't sure he should leave her.

It was still only nine-thirty. Nobody would be in bed yet.

"Callers?" Mrs. Decker said. "There was that young man I sent down to the basement a day or two ago. Did you see him?"

"Yes, I did," said Vee, and she dragged herself upstairs. There was plenty of stuff in her apartment which would do. What would kill a human would kill Vee too.

There wouldn't be any uproar afterwards. Even a real thorough post-mortem wouldn't be likely to show



anything strange about the mortal remains of Vee Brown. And young women were often found dead in their lonely apartments.

Suddenly she was being supported. "What's the matter, Miss Brown?" she was asked.

It was Billy Clark, anxious, concerned.

"I'm tired," she said, "terribly tired."

He helped her to her room, opened the door for her, supported her to the solitary armchair. His eyes expressed his worry. They were friendly eyes.

She managed to smile. "I'll be all right, Mr. Clark," she said. "I've been on my feet too long, that's all."

He squared his shoulders. "Miss Brown," he said, "I've been trying to talk to you since you came. You don't know many people in town, do you?"

"I don't know anybody," she said bleakly.

"You know me," he said. "I was wondering . . . if maybe you'd like to see a show sometime, or something?"

"See a show?" she repeated quizzically.

"Well, I thought you might not have anybody special," he said defensively. "And I'm not so dumb once I get to know people. You won't know about this, being the kind of girl you are, but I get so nervous trying to speak to a girl that I

usually walk right on past her. Isn't that silly?"

"No," said Vee.

"The trouble is, if you're shy you get hurt, and then the next time you're still more shy, more afraid of being hurt. So that's why I wanted to ask you first—is there anybody? I mean . . ."

"Nobody," said Vee. "Nobody at all."

"Then maybe . . ."

"Billy," said Vee quietly, "I'd never hurt you."

**U**NDERSTANDING dawned in his face. "You've been hurt too. You're like me. Vee, I knew it somehow. I knew somehow that though you looked like a girl with the world at her feet, you needed somebody just like I do. Vee, you and I could . . ."

Afraid of rebuff for going too far, he stopped abruptly, coloring.

This was the way they did it. They hurt each other sometimes, for there was never any guarantee that what one would feel, the other would feel. But this was how it happened—not by bargains, not by reason, not by hard logic.

"It's a fine night," said Vee softly. "How about us going out for a walk?"

He was delighted. "But . . . surely you're too tired?"

Vee jumped to her feet. "Suddenly, Billy," she said, "I'm not tired any more."

**END**

# Talent

*Life's but a walking shadow*

*— says the Bard — but this*

*Player was heard forever!*

**I**T is perhaps a pity that nothing is known of Andrew Benson's parents.

The same reasons which prompted them to leave him as a foundling on the steps of the St. Andrews Orphanage also caused them to maintain a discreet anonymity. The event occurred on the morning of March 3rd, 1943—the war era, as you probably recall—so, in a way, the child may be regarded as a wartime casualty. Similar occurrences

were by no means rare during those days, even in Pasadena, where the Orphanage was located.

After the usual tentative and fruitless inquiries, the good sisters took him in. It was there that he acquired his first name, from the patron and patronymic saint of the establishment. The "Benson" was added some years later, by the couple who eventually adopted him.

It is difficult, at this late

date, to determine what sort of a child Andrew was. Orphanage records are sketchy, at best, and Sister Rosemarie, who acted as supervisor of the boys' dormitory, is long since dead. Sister Albertine, the primary grades teacher of the Orphanage School, is now—to put it as delicately as possible—in her senility, and her testimony is necessarily colored by knowledge of subsequent events.

That Andrew never learned to talk until he was almost seven years old seems almost incredible. The forced gregariousness and the conspicuous lack of individual attention characteristic of orphanage upbringing would make it appear as though the ability to speak is necessary for actual survival in such an environment. Scarcely more credible is Sister Albertine's theory that Andrew *knew* how to talk but merely refused to do so.

For what it is worth, she remembers him as an unusually precocious youngster, who appeared to possess an intelligence and understanding far beyond his years. Instead of employing speech, however, he relied on pantomime, an art at which he was so brilliantly adept (if Sister Albertine is to be believed) that his muteness was hardly noticed.

"He could imitate anybody," she declares. "The other children, the Sisters, even the Mother Superior. Of course I

had to punish him for *that*. But it was remarkable, the way he was able to pick up all the little mannerisms and facial expressions of another person, just at a glance. And that's all it took for Andrew. Just a glance.

"Visitor's Day was Sunday. Naturally, Andrew never had any visitors, but he liked to hang around the corridor and watch them come in. And afterwards, in the dormitory at night, he'd put on a regular performance for the other boys. He could impersonate every single man, woman or child who'd come to the Orphanage that day—the way they walked, the way they moved, every action and gesture. Even though he never said a word, nobody made the mistake of thinking Andrew was mentally deficient. For a while, Dr. Clement had the idea he might be a mute."

**D**R. Roger Clement is one of the few persons who might be able to furnish more objective data concerning Andrew Benson's early years. Unfortunately, he passed away in 1954; victim of a fire which also destroyed his home and his office files.

It was Dr. Clement who attended Andrew on the night that he saw his first motion picture.

The date was 1949, some Saturday evening in the late fall of the year. The Orphan-



age received and showed one film a week, and only children of school age were permitted to attend. Andrew's inability—or unwillingness—to speak had caused some difficulty when he entered primary grades that September, and several months went by before he was allowed to join his classmates in the auditorium for the Saturday night screenings. But it is known that he eventually did so.

The picture was the last (and probably the least) of the Marx Brothers movies. Its title was *Love Happy*, and if it is remembered by the general public at all today, that is due to the fact that the film contained a brief walk-on appearance by a then-unknown blonde bit player named Marilyn Monroe.

But the Orphanage audience had other reasons for regarding it as memorable, for *Love Happy* was the picture that sent Andrew Benson into his trance.

Long after the lights came up again in the auditorium, the child sat there, immobile, his eyes staring glassily at the blank screen. When his companions noticed and sought to arouse him he did not respond. One of the Sisters (possibly Sister Rosemarie) shook him. He promptly collapsed in a dead faint. Dr. Clement was summoned, and he administered to the patient. Andrew Benson did not recover con-

sciousness until the following morning.

And it was then that he talked.

He talked immediately, he talked perfectly, he talked fluently—but he did not talk in the manner of a six-year-old child. The voice that issued from his lips was that of a middle-aged man. It was a nasal, rasping voice, and even without the accompanying grimaces and facial expressions it was instantly and unmistakably recognizable as the voice of Groucho Marx.

Andrew Benson mimicked Groucho in his *Sam Grunion* role to perfection, word for word. Then he “did” Chico Marx. After that he relapsed into silence again. For a moment it was thought he had reverted to his mute phase. But it was an eloquent silence, and soon it was understood. He was imitating Harpo. In rapid succession, Andrew created recognizable vocal and visual portraits of Raymond Burr, Melville Cooper, Eric Blore and the other actors who played small roles in the picture. His impersonations seemed uncanny to his companions. Even the Sisters were impressed.

“Why, he even *looked* like Groucho,” Sister Albertine insists.

**I**GNORING the question of how a towheaded moppet of six can achieve a physical

resemblance to Groucho Marx without makeup, it is nevertheless an established fact that Andrew Benson gained immediate celebrity as the official mimic of the Orphanage.

From that moment on, he talked regularly, if not freely. That is to say, he replied to direct questions. He recited his lessons in the classroom. He responded with the outward forms of politeness required by Orphanage discipline. But he was never loquacious, or even *communicative*, in the ordinary sense. The only time he became spontaneously articulate was immediately following the showing of the weekly movie.

There was no recurrence of his initial seizure, but each Saturday night show brought in its wake a complete dramatic recapitulation by the gifted youngster. During the fall of '49 and the winter of '50, Andrew Benson saw many movies. There was *Sorrowful Jones*, with Bob Hope; *Tarzan's Magic Fountain*; *The Fighting O'Flynn*; *The Life of Riley*; *Little Women*, and a number of other films, current and older. Naturally, these pictures were subject to approval by the Sisters before being shown. Movies emphasizing violence were not included. Still, several westerns reached the Orphanage screen, and it is significant that Andrew Benson reacted in what

was to become a characteristic fashion.

"Funny thing," declares Albert Dominguez, who attended the Orphanage during the same period as Andrew Benson and is one of the few persons located who is willing to admit, let alone discuss, the fact. "At first Andy imitated everybody—all the men, that is. He never imitated none of the women. But after he started to see Westerns, it got so he was choosy, like. He just imitated the villains. I don't mean like when us guys was *playing* cowboys—you know, when one guy is the sheriff and one is a gun-slinger. I mean, he imitated villains all the time. He could talk like 'em, he could even *look* like 'em. We use to razz hell out of him, you know?"

It is probably as a result of the "razzing" that Andrew Benson, on the evening of May 17th, 1950, attempted to slit the throat of Frank Phillips with a table-knife. Still, Albert Dominguez claims that the older boy offered no provocation. His view is that Andrew Benson was exactly duplicating the screen role of a western desperado in an old Charles Starrett movie.

The incident was hushed up and no action taken.

We have little information on Andrew Benson's growth and development between the summer of 1950 and the autumn of 1955. Dominguez left

the Orphanage, nobody else appears willing to testify, and Sister Albertine had retired to a rest-home. As a result, there is nothing available concerning what may well have been Andrew's crucial, formative years. The meager records of his classwork seem satisfactory enough, and there is nothing to indicate that he was a disciplinary problem to his instructors. In June of 1955 he was photographed with the rest of his classmates upon the occasion of graduation from Eighth Grade.

His face is a mere blur, an almost blank smudge in a sea of pre-adolescent countenances. What he actually looked like at that age is hard to tell.

The Bensons thought that he resembled their son, David.

**L**ITTLE David Benson had died of polio in 1953. Two years later his parents came to St. Andrews Orphanage seeking to adopt a boy. They had David's picture with them. They were frank to state that they sought a physical resemblance as a guide to making their choice.

Did Andrew Benson see that photograph? Did—as has been subsequently theorized by certain irresponsible alarmists—he see certain *home movies* which the Bensons had taken of their child?

We must confine ourselves to the known facts; which are,

simply, that Mr. and Mrs. Louis Benson, of Pasadena, California, legally adopted Andrew Benson, aged 12, on December 9th, 1955.

Andrew Benson went to live in their home, as their son. He entered the public high school. He became the owner of a bicycle. He received an allowance of one dollar a week. And he went to the movies.

Andrew Benson went to the movies, and there were no restrictions at all. For several months, that is. During this period he saw comedies, dramas, westerns, musicals, melodramas. He *must* have seen melodramas. Was there a film, released early in 1956, in which an actor played the role of a gangster who pushed a victim out of a second-story window?

Knowing what we do today, we must suspect that there must have been. But at the time, when the actual incident occurred, Andrew Benson was exonerated. He and the other boy had been "scuffling" in a classroom after school, and the boy had "accidentally fallen." At least, this is the *official* version of the affair. The boy—now Pvt. Raymond Schuyler, USMC—maintains to this day that Benson deliberately tried to kill him.

"He was spooky, that kid," Schuyler insists. "None of us ever really got close to him. It was like there was nothing to get close to, you know? I

mean, he kept changing off. From one day to the next you could never figure out what he was going to be like. Of course, we all knew he imitated these movie actors. He was only a freshman but already he was a big shot in the dramatic club. But he imitated *all* the time. One minute he'd be real quiet, and the next, wham! You know that story, the one about Jekyll and Hyde? Well, that was Andrew Benson. Afternoon he grabbed me, we weren't even talking to each other. He just came up to me at the window and I swear to God he changed right before my eyes. It was as if he all of a sudden got about a foot taller and fifty pounds heavier, and his face was real wild. He pushed me out of the window, without one word. Of course, I was scared spitless, and maybe I just *thought* he changed. I mean, nobody can actually do a thing like that, can they?"

This question, if it arose at all at the time, remained unanswered. We do know that Andrew Benson was brought to the attention of Dr. Hans Fahringer, child psychiatrist and part-time guidance counselor at the school, and that his initial examination disclosed no apparent abnormalities of personality or behavior-patterns. Dr. Fahringer did, however, have several long talks with the Bensons. As a result Andrew was for-

bidden to attend motion pictures. The following year, Dr. Fahringer voluntarily offered to examine young Andrew. Undoubtedly his interest had been aroused by the amazing dramatic abilities the boy was showing in his extra-curricular activities at the school.

**O**NLY one such interview ever took place, and it is to be regretted that Dr. Fahringer neither committed his findings to paper nor communicated them to the Bensons before his sudden, shocking death at the hands of an unknown assailant. It is believed (or was believed by the police, at the time) that one of his former patients, committed to an institution as a psychotic and subsequently escaped, may have been guilty of the crime.

All that we know is that it occurred some short while following a local re-run of *Man in the Attic*. In this film Jack Palance essayed the role of Jack the Ripper.

It is interesting, today, to examine some of the so-called "horror movies" of those years, including the re-runs of earlier vehicles starring Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Peter Lorre and a number of other actors.

We cannot say with any certainty, of course, that Andrew Benson was violating the wishes of his foster-parents and secretly attending motion pictures. But *if* he did, it is



quite likely that he would frequent the smaller neighborhood houses, many of which specialized in re-runs. And we do know, from the remarks of fellow-classmates during those high-school years, that "Andy" was familiar—almost omnisciently so—with the mannerisms of these performers.

The evidence is often conflicting. Joan Charters, for example, is willing to "swear on a stack of Bibles" that Andrew Benson, at the age of 15, was "a dead ringer for Peter Lorre—the same bug eyes and everything." Whereas Nick Dossinger, who attended classes with Benson a year later, insists that he "looked just like Boris Karloff."

Granted that adolescence may bring about a considerable increase in height during the period of a year, it is nevertheless difficult to imagine how a "dead ringer for Peter Lorre" could metamorphize into an asthenic Karloff type.

A mass of testimony is available concerning Andrew Benson during those years, but almost all of it deals with his phenomenal histrionic talent and his startling skill at "ad lib" impersonation of motion picture actors. Apparently he had given up mimicking his associates and contemporaries almost entirely.

"He said he liked to do actors better, because they were bigger," said Don Brady, who

appeared with him in the Senior Play. "I asked him what he meant by 'bigger' and he said it was just that. Actors were *bigger* on the screen. Sometimes they were twenty feet tall. He said, 'Why bother with little people when you can be big?' He was a real offbeat character, that one."

The phrases recur. "Oddball." "Screwball." "Real gone." They are picturesque, but hardly enlightening. And there seems to be little recollection of Andrew Benson as a friend or classmate, in the ordinary roles of adolescence. It's the imitator who is remembered, with admiration and, frequently, with distaste bordering on actual apprehension.

"He was so good he scared you. But that's when he was doing those impersonations, of course. The rest of the time, you scarcely knew he was around."

"Classes? I guess he did all right. I didn't notice him much."

"Andrew was a fair student. He could recite when called upon, but he never volunteered. His marks were average. I got the impression he was rather withdrawn."

"No, he never dated much. Come to think of it, I don't think he went out with girls at all. I never paid much attention to him, except when he was on stage, of course."

"I wasn't really what you

call close to Andy. I don't know anybody who seemed to be friends with him. He was so quiet, outside of the dramatics. And when he got up there, it was like he was a different person. He was real great, you know? We all figured he'd end up at the Pasadena Playhouse."

THE reminiscences of his contemporaries are frequently apt to touch upon matters which did not directly involve Andrew Benson. The years 1956 and 1957 are still remembered, by high school students of the area in particular, as the years of the curfew. It was a voluntary curfew, of course, but it was nevertheless strictly observed by most of the female students during the period of the "werewolf murders"—that series of savage, still-unsolved crimes which terrorized the community for well over a year. Certain cannibalistic aspects of the slaying of the five young women led to the "werewolf" appellation on the part of the sensation-mongering press. The *Wolf Man* series made by Universal had been revived, and perhaps this had something to do with the association.

But to return to Andrew Benson: he grew up, went to school, and lived the normal life of a dutiful step-son. If his foster-parents were a bit strict, he made no complaints.

If they punished him because they suspected he sometimes slipped out of his room at night, he made no complaints or denials. If they seemed apprehensive lest he be disobeying their set injunctions not to attend the movies, he offered no overt defiance.

The only known clash between Andrew Benson and his family came about as a result of their flat refusal to allow a television set in their home. Whether or not they were concerned about the possible encouragement of Andrew's mimicry or whether they had merely developed an allergy to Lawrence Welk is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, they balked at the acquisition of a TV receiver. Andrew begged and pleaded, pointing out that he "needed" television as an aid to a future dramatic career. His argument had some justification for, in his senior year, Andrew had indeed been "scouted" by the famous Pasadena Playhouse, and there was even some talk of a future professional career without the necessity of formal training.

But the Bensons were adamant on the television question; they remained adamant right up to the day of their death.

This unfortunate circumstance occurred at Balboa, where the Bensons owned a small cottage and maintained a little cabin-cruiser. The

elder Bensons and Andrew were heading for Catalina Channel when it overturned in choppy waters. Andrew managed to cling to the craft until rescued, but his foster-parents were gone. It was a common enough accident; you've probably seen something just like it in the movies a dozen times.

Andrew, just turned eighteen, was left an orphan once more—but an orphan in full possession of a lovely home, and with the expectation of coming into a sizable inheritance when he reached twenty-one. The Benson estate was administered by the family attorney, Justin L. Fowler, and he placed young Andrew on an allowance of forty dollars a week—an amount sufficient for a recent graduate of high school to survive on, but hardly enough to maintain him in luxury.

**I**T is to be feared that violent scenes were precipitated between the young man and his attorney. There is no point in recapitulating them here, or in condemning Fowler for what may seem—on the surface—to be the development of a fixation.

But up until the night that he was struck down by a hit-and-run driver in the street before his house, Attorney Fowler seemed almost obsessed with the desire to prove that the Benson lad was legal-

ly incompetent, or worse. Indeed, it was his investigations which led to the uncovering of what few facts are presently available concerning the life of Andrew Benson.

Certain other hypotheses—one hesitates to dignify them with the term, "conclusions"—he apparently extrapolated from these meager findings, or fabricated out of thin air. Unless, of course, he did manage to discover details which he never actually disclosed. Without the support of such details there is no way of authenticating what seem to be fantastic conjectures.

A random sampling, as remembered from various conversations Fowler had with the authorities, will suffice.

"I don't think the kid is even human, for that matter. Just because he showed up on those orphanage steps, you call him a foundling. Changeling might be a better word for it. Yes, I know they don't believe in such things any more. And if you talk about life-forms from other planets, they laugh at you and tell you to join the Fortean Society. So happens I'm a member in good standing.

"Changeling? It's probably a more accurate term than the narrow meaning implies. I'm talking about the way he *changes* when he sees these movies. No, don't take my word for it—ask anyone who's ever seen him act. Better still,

ask those who never saw him on a stage, but just watched him imitate movie performers in private. You'll find out he did a lot more than just *imitate*. He *became* the actor. Yes, I mean he underwent an actual physical transformation. Chameleon. Or some other form of life. Who can say?

"No, I don't pretend to understand it. I know it's not 'scientific' according to the way *you* define science. But that doesn't mean it's impossible. There are a lot of life-forms in the universe, and we can only guess at some of them. Why shouldn't there be one that's abnormally sensitive to mimicry?

"You know what effect the movies can have on so-called 'normal' human beings, under certain conditions. It's a hypnotic state, this movie-viewing, and you can ask the psychologists for confirmation. Darkness, concentration, suggestion—all the elements are present. And there's post-hypnotic suggestion, too. Again, psychiatrists will back me up on that. Most people tend to identify with various characters on the screen. That's where our hero-worship comes in, that's why we have western-movie fans, and detective fans, and all the rest. Supposedly ordinary people come out of the theatre and fantasy themselves as the heroes and heroines they saw

up there on the screen; imitate them, too.

"That's what Andrew Benson did, of course. Only suppose he could carry it one step further? Suppose he was capable of *being* what he saw portrayed? And he chose to *be* the villains? I tell you, it's time to investigate those killings of a few years back, all of them. Not just the murder of those girls, but the murder of the two doctors who examined Benson when he was a child, and the death of his foster-parents, too. I don't think any of these things were accidents. I think some people got too close to the secret, and Benson put them out of the way.

"Why? How should I know why? Any more than I know what he's looking for when he watches the movies. But he's looking for something, I can guarantee that. Who knows what purpose such a life-form can have, or what he intends to do with his power? All I can do is warn you."

**I**T IS easy to dismiss Attorney Fowler as a paranoid type, though perhaps it is unfair, in that we cannot evaluate the reasons for his outburst. That he knew (or believed he knew) something is self-evident. As a matter of fact, on the very evening of his death he was apparently about to set down his findings on paper.

Deplorably, all that he ever set down was a preamble. It is a quotation from Eric Voegelin, concerning rigid pragmatic attitudes of "scientism", so-called:

"The assumption (1) that the mathematized science of natural phenomena is a model science to which all other sciences ought to conform; (2) that all realms of being are accessible to the methods of sciences of phenomena; and (3) that all reality which is not accessible to sciences of phenomena is either irrelevant or, in the more radical form of the dogma, illusory."

But Attorney Fowler is dead, and we must deal with the living.

With Max Schick, for example. He is the motion picture and television agent who visited Andrew Benson at his home shortly after the death of the elder Bensons, and offered him an immediate contract.

"You're a natural," Schick declared. "Never mind with the Pasadena Playhouse bit. I can spot you right now, believe me! With what you got, we'll back Brando right off the map! Of course, we gotta start small, but I know just the gimmick. Main thing is to establish you in a starring slot right away. None of this stock-contract jazz, get me? The studios aren't handing 'em out in the first place, and

even if you landed one, you'd end up on Cloud Nowhere. No, the deal is to get you a lead and billing right off the bat. And like I said, I got the angle.

"We go to a small indie producer, get it? Must be a dozen of 'em operating right now, and all of 'em making the same thing. Only one kind of picture that combines low budgets with big grosses, and that's a science fiction movie. You've seen them.

"Yeah, you heard me, a science fiction movie. Whaddya mean, you never saw one? Are you kidding? How *about* that? You mean you never saw any science fiction pictures at *all*?

"Oh, your folks, eh? Had to sneak out? And they only show that kind of stuff at the downtown houses?

"Well look, kid, it's about time, that's all I can say. It's about time! Hey, just so's you know what we're talking about, you better get on the ball and take in one right away.

"Sure, I'm positive, there must be one playing a downtown first run now. Why don't you go this afternoon? I got some work to finish up here at the office—run you down in my car, you can go on to the show, meet me back there when you get out.

"Sure, you can take the car after you drop me off. Be my guest."

**S**O Andrew Benson saw his first science fiction movie. He drove there and back in Max Schick's car. Coincidentally enough, it was the late afternoon of the day when Attorney Fowler became a hit-and-run victim. Schick has good reason to remember Andrew Benson's reappearance at his office just after dusk.

"He had a look on his face that was out of this world," Schick says.

"How'd you like the picture?" I ask him.

"It was wonderful," he tells me. "Just what I've been looking for all these years. And to think I didn't know."

"Didn't know what?" I ask. But he isn't talking to me any more. You can see that. He's talking to himself."

"I thought there must be something like that," he says. "Something better than Dracula, or Frankenstein's monster, or all the rest. Something bigger, more powerful. Something I could really be. And now I know. And now I'm going to."

Max Schick is unable to maintain coherency from this point on. But his direct account is not necessary. We are, unfortunately, all too well aware of what happened next.

Max Schick sat there in his chair and watched Andrew Benson *change*.

He watched him *grow*. He watched him put forth the eyes, the stalks, the writhing tentacles. He watched him twist and tower, filling the room and then *overflowing* until the flimsy stucco walls collapsed and there was nothing but the green, gigantic horror, the sixty-foot-high monstrosity that may have been born in a screenwriter's brain or have been spawned beyond the stars, but certainly existed and drew nourishment from realms far from a three-dimensional world or three-dimensional concepts of sanity.

Max Schick will never forget that night and neither, of course, will anybody else.

That was the night the monster destroyed Los Angeles.

**END**

*In The Next Issue . . .*

## **KANGAROO COURT**

**A Short Novel by Daniel F. Galouye**

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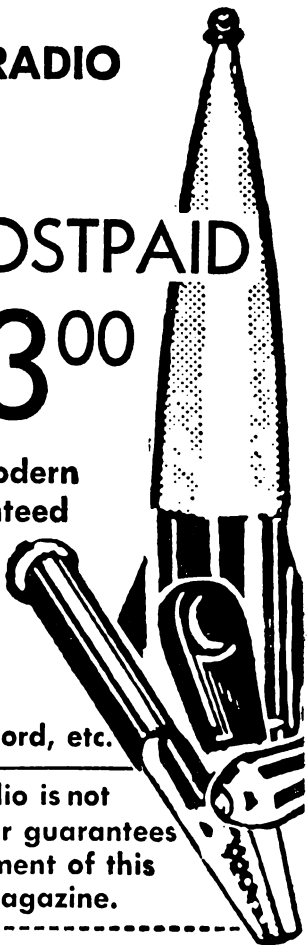
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*The whereabouts of a  
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By SYLVIA JACOBS    Illustrated by RITTER

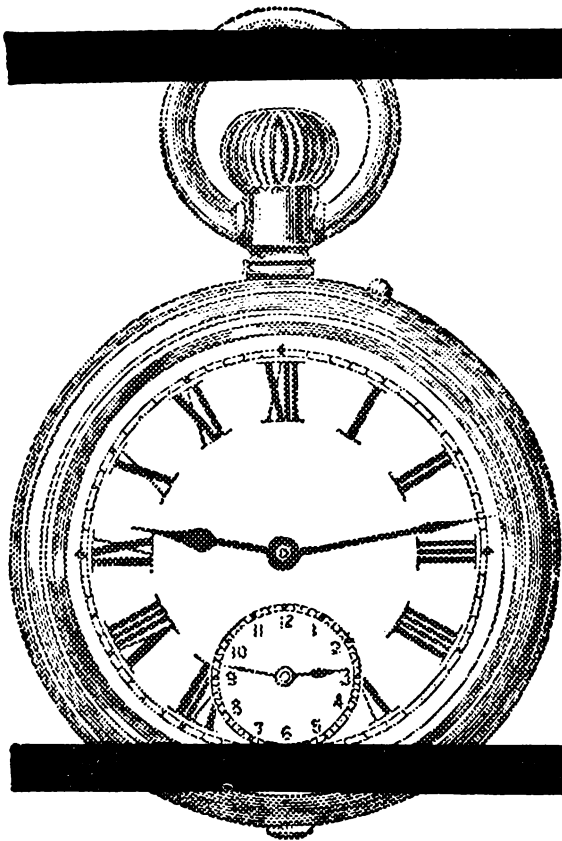
# TIME PAYMENT

**S**LICK Tennant had a hunch. The sixth sense that had made him king of the local rackets, that had warned him in time when three of his men fell to the machine guns of a rival gang, now told him that the Feds were after him, that they had evidence to send him up for a long stretch. But he was going where even the Feds couldn't extradite him.

Slick Tennant was going to hide in the future.

They didn't call him Slick for nothing. For months, a private dick in his pay had shadowed Dr. Richard Porter, inventor of a device called by reporters a time-travel machine, by comedians a crystal ball, and by Dr. Porter's fellow-psychiatrists a Meta-chronoscope. Slick knew the





doctor was a widower, knew where he lived, knew pressure could be put upon him through Dickie Porter, aged seven. In Slick's pocket was a house-key Dr. Porter thought he had lost two weeks ago.

But Slick hadn't disclosed his intentions to anyone. The chauffeur of his bullet-proof car let him out several miles from the Porter residence.

Strolling along the street, Slick might have been any citizen on his way home. A hat shadowed his features as he passed under the street lights, and he carried a briefcase. He hailed a cruising cab and proceeded to a spot two blocks from the Porter home, being careful not to tip too much or too little to attract the driver's attention.

Dr. Porter propped an elbow on his pillow, trying to orient himself in the fuzziness that follows a midnight awakening. He stifled a gasp, and sat up suddenly, as he saw that the man silhouetted against the living room lamp had pajama-clad Dickie by the arm. The child was rubbing his eyes, but there wasn't a whimper out of him.

"I got a gun on the kid," the man said. "I like kids and I won't hurt him if you do what I say."

The doctor struggled to keep his voice soothing and professional. "Of course you wouldn't," he said. "You don't want to go back to the hospital."

The man laughed. "I ain't one of your nuts, Doc. And I don't want your money. I got plenty. All I want from you is a little trip in your time machine."

"Metachronoscope," corrected the doctor. "It's very misleading to call it a time-travel machine."

**L**ETTING go of the boy, Slick dealt Dr. Porter a vicious slap. "That'll learn you not to pull none of your high-brow stuff. Is it my fault I had to quit school to keep the family from starvin' when my old man got sent up? If Slick Tennant says it's a time-travel machine, that's what you call it, see?"

"Yes, I see," Dr. Porter

said faintly. The mention of gangland's most dreaded name had more effect on him than the blow.

"Now let's get something else straight. Once, on TV, they said a couple of guys came back. Another time, the news program said they couldn't come back and give tips on the ponies. Which is right? Can you bring me back any time you want to?"

"Absolutely not. The decision is irrevocable. The public's impression that the future can be altered or predicted is incorrect."

"Fine. I don't want to come back. And I don't need to change the future, neither. Things may be different, but a smart cookie can always get along. Now, according to the news, you only sent these guys ahead a year. That ain't enough. What's the most you could send me ahead?"

"Theoretically, we could send a subject ahead as much as twenty years, if we could find anyone who would consent to that, and undoubtedly we could learn a great deal more by so doing."

"But you did find out that the boys come through okay?"

"Yes. We sent these two men ahead in 1961. When they returned to awareness, it was 1962. Physically and mentally they were as fit as before."

"Did they know what happened to them?"

"Well, the year had no ap-



parent duration for them, but they had normal speed memories of the intervening year when they returned to awareness. Evidently their fore-memories for the entire year must have been condensed into the brief period they were in the field. From this phenomenon, we derive the term 'sending the subjects ahead' which has so often been misinterpreted. But it's important to note that these condensed fore-memories were not available until twenty-four to forty-eight hours after the events, which means the future cannot be effectively predicted by present techniques."

That sounded like plain English; it sounded as if it meant something, but Slick wasn't quite sure what. He seized on the last remark, which he understood.

"What did you build this gadget for, if you can't tell fortunes with it?" he asked.

"The layman thinks in terms of immediate practical application. But our primary objective was knowledge of the human mind. We confirmed the existence of mental capacities that have been suspected for centuries. We formulated the axiom that awareness is a function of subconscious fore-memories becoming currently available. We experimentally suspended awareness without inducing unconsciousness, by causing

the fore-memories to condense. I hope the process will develop into a useful tool for my profession, that we learn how to superimpose conditioning on the blank area to produce rational, socially acceptable action, rather than the literal and irrational compulsion which is a drawback to implanting post-hypnotic commands. But I can't tell you at this point where our research will lead."

**T**HIS double-talk had Slick going around in circles. But he had a strong hunch that taking a trip in the machine was the right thing to do, and he wasn't going to let Porter divert him from that.

"Let's get down to cases, Doc. Just exactly what's going to happen to me when I get in this machine?"

"It's difficult to explain the process in lay terms, particularly under stress. But this may help you to understand it. Have you ever had the experience of going back to sleep for a few moments after you awoke in the morning, and dreaming a long, involved dream?"

"Sure. I get some good hunches that way."

"Then you know the dream may cover a period of hours, days, or even years. People in the dream move and speak at a normal speed. Yet when you awaken again and look at the clock, you see that only

a few minutes or even seconds have elapsed. A motion picture of the events in the dream would be nothing but a gabble and a blur, if projected at such terrific speed."

"Yeah, that's right. I had that happen plenty of times, and I always thought it was kind of funny."

"It demonstrates the capacity of the human mind to function independently of the limitations of chronological time. And premonitory experiences—what you call hunches—give us an inkling of the fore-memory phenomenon. In our dreams, the past, future, literal and symbolical material mingles. But by subjecting the physical brain to a certain type of electro-magnetic field, we can isolate the fore-memories, condensed as in the dream, while the subject acts as if in a waking state."

"Does it hurt when a guy's brain goes into this field?"

"Not at all. Awareness and physical sensations are totally suspended. The elapsing time has no apparent duration. That means you can't feel anything at all, you don't know what has happened until later, and twenty hours or even twenty years pass in a second, as far as your mind is concerned."

"Why in the hell didn't you give me that straight, instead of dragging in all this dream business? That's just what I'm looking for, just what I

figured it would be from the news stories. Do you throw this here field ahead or does the time machine travel along with the guy inside?"

Dr. Porter sighed slightly. The man had a preconceived idea, and nothing Porter had said had altered it in the slightest. "The machine doesn't actually travel," he explained patiently. "That's why I objected to calling it a time-travel machine. It exists here and now and it will exist in the future, I suppose."

"You mean it'll be there when I come out of the field?"

"I said I suppose so. Why should that concern you, particularly?"

"Well, I'll tell you. Slick Tennant pays off two ways. Maybe you only heard about the times he paid off guys for crossing him, but he pays off guys that help him, too. I'm paying for your help by giving you a chance to save your skin. I got a hand grenade in this briefcase. When I get through with that machine, I'm going to blow her to little, bitty pieces. Maybe you can't bring me back, but I don't want you to have the machine to send the cops after me, neither. By the time you get a new machine built, my trail will be cold."

Intellectually, Dr. Porter accepted the concept of the inevitability of events. If Slick was going to blow up the machine, he was going to blow

it up. Still the old, old human habit of trying to control the future kept obstinately insinuating itself.

"But you don't need to destroy the machine," he protested. "Look, let me try to explain—"

"I thought you'd try to talk me out of it," Slick said ominously. "I know that a lot of money and work went into that gadget, but I got to blow her up. You should be glad you're not on my list or you'd get blown up with her. And I got no time for any more talkin'. I found out all I want to know. Now, get up and get dressed, and make it snappy. You're going to drive me over to the University."

Porter had been careful not to make any moves that might alarm his unbidden guest; he swung his feet obediently over the side of the bed. "Is Dickie going with us?" he asked.

"You're damned right he is. I don't want you high-signing any cops on the way, and the kid might even be sharp enough to phone the station himself, if we left him here." He didn't add that he had an even better reason for taking the boy.

"Then let him get some clothes on, too. It's cold outside." To his son, Dr. Porter added, "Don't be afraid, Dickie. Everything is going to be all right."

"Sure, Daddy," the boy said sturdily. "You just do like he

says. He's like the bad guys on TV."

"You got a smart kid, Porter," Slick said, grinning. "Knows when to keep his trap shut and what to say when he opens it. That's more than some of the hoods in this town know."

**D**RIVING down the freeway toward the University campus, Slick and the boy sat in the back seat of Dr. Porter's car. Slick tried the kid on his lap for size; it was a nice fit. The papers said the time machine was a two-passenger job, but if that wasn't the straight dope, Slick could hold the kid on his lap, like this.

The gangster squeezed Dickie's small hand. "You're all right, boy. Plenty of guys a lot bigger than you would be bawlin' if Slick Tennant invited them to take a little ride. If I ever have a kid of my own, I'd want one just like you." He tucked a bill in the pocket of Dickie's jacket. "This is to buy you a play gat or something."

"Thank you, Mr. Slick," the boy said gravely.

Though business compelled him to do things like rubbing out the competition, Slick was really soft-hearted. Some of the proceeds of his illicit activities were devoted each year to buying Christmas trees, turkeys, and toys for poor children. He kind of hated to separate Dickie Porter from

his father, but it was the only way he could see to insure a safe passage through time.

And then, Slick reflected, he *would* have a kid of his own, or at least one he was responsible for. Slick decided then and there that he would send the boy to the fanciest high-class boarding school they had in the future, the kind the millionaire kids went to. Dickie would have a pony, a bike, a dog, plenty of fried chicken and strawberry shortcake, all the things Slick had yearned for in his own slum childhood. He would live in the country, where there were miles of fresh green grass to play on, and he would wear a silver-studded cowboy suit with real spurs. Unless the kids where they were going would be wearing space-pilot suits instead. By gosh, that would be something. Maybe Slick could take the kid on a luxury cruise to the Moon.

To provide these things, Slick would have to follow the only trade he knew, move in on the local mobs. But he wouldn't let Dickie mix with hoods and racketeers. Dickie would study to be something respectable, a mouthpiece or maybe a doctor like his old man. Dickie would have all the advantages a kid could ask for—everything except a real father.

He might even have that, come to think of it. Dr. Porter might easily live another

twenty years, now that Slick had warned him to get away from the machine before it was blown up. First, Slick would get some plastic surgery, so Porter and any other old ducks who were still alive wouldn't recognize him. There ought to be a lot of improvements in plastic surgery in twenty years. Probably a guy could even get his fingerprints changed. Then he would hire a private dick to look up Porter.

Slick pictured the aged father being reunited with the son he'd lost twenty years before, seeing the child just as he'd been at the moment of parting, with Slick playing Santa Claus in the background, sending the kid a roll of thousand-dollar bills with a pink ribbon around it for a present. It was such a touching thought that tears came to the gangster's eyes, as they did when he watched a sad movie.

He was sorry he couldn't let Porter and the boy in on his plans right now, but he wasn't ready to tip his hand.

**T**HE machine was a two-passenger job, all right. Slick could tell that the minute he saw it. There was no enclosure, just two reclining barber chairs fixed on two circular plates sunk in a platform. After the switch was set, Porter had explained, the additional weight of an occu-

pant of the chair would complete the contact and the field would build up. Slick examined the control panel, particularly the dial, which was calibrated into twenty sections, each for a ninety-second exposure to the field.

"You did say twenty years, didn't you?" Dr. Porter asked.

"If that's the limit," Slick replied tersely, "like I heard."

"How old are you?"

"You mean can my ticker take it? Well, I'm forty-five. They tell me I don't look it." Slick was vain of his black hair, without a thread of gray in it.

"No, you don't look it. But let me take your pulse and blood pressure."

**H**E submitted, without letting go of either his gun or brief case.

"You seem to be in good shape, as nearly as I can tell from a superficial examination. But don't you want to reconsider this twenty-year arrangement? I can't change the setting once you're in the chair, you know. Are you sure you understand that the only thing affected will be your own subjective experience, that time will go on just as it always has, but that you won't be aware of anything between now and twenty years from now?"

"Sure. You told me that three-four times already. What are you trying to do? Stall till

help gets here?" Slick asked suspiciously.

"I'm not stalling," the doctor said. "In fact, I'm only too glad to find someone to whom the present means so little that he's willing to go into a twenty-year blank. But ethics insist that I warn you."

He turned the switch to the twenty-year mark.

"I'm ready," he said.

"Whaddya mean, warn me?" Slick snapped. "Is this thing booby trapped?"

"Certainly not. I have merely tried to explain that it is not exactly what you anticipated—"

"You know what I'm drivin' at. Have you got the machine set to electrocute me or explode the grenade? A lot of you respectable citizens don't figure a guy like me is exactly human. You wouldn't call it murder to rub me out. You'd think you was doin' the town a favor."

"Some people would, perhaps, but I'm a doctor, not a judge. I've spent my life trying to find out what makes men like you act as they do, not in devising means of punishing them. But even if I wanted to do you bodily harm, I couldn't. The machine has a built-in safety factor."

This was where Slick sprang a little surprise.

"You willing to bet your kid's life on that?" he asked, picking up the boy.

He took two steps toward



the platform, watching Porter's reactions. If the father made a lunge toward the panel, Slick would know the setting was wrong. But Porter only stood stunned. The setting was safe, then, but Slick had only Porter's word that it couldn't be changed after contact. Maybe a change would be fatal to the passenger. So he would make sure there would be no changes.

"I always take out travel insurance, Doc," Slick said, and, stepping onto the platform, he put the boy gently into one of the chairs and reclined in the other himself.

"Dickie!" Dr. Porter cried.

It was the last thing Slick or the boy heard him say.

**S**LICK came back to awareness of where he was and what he was doing. He was in one of the radial corridors, but at what compass point, at which level, and how many miles inside the outer walls of the city, he didn't know. He ran his fingers in a puzzled manner through his hair. He had never quite figured out the lettering system of the "circles" which weren't actually circles, but multagons.

He didn't even know what time it was. In this perpetual mock daylight, there was no change; there were no variations of seasons in this sterilized, irradiated, humidified, filtered, deodorized, oxygenated, constantly circulating

seventy-five degrees. He remembered when streets used to have names, when you needed a street guide instead of a course in geometry to find your way around the city. He remembered when a city was many buildings, not one immense pyramid, when you wore dark glasses against the sun's glare on the pavements, when a Santa Ana blew dust over everything or smog stung your eyes, when people drove their cars into the downtown congestion instead of leaving them on the outskirts, when they said to each other, "There hasn't been enough rain this year," because there was no weather control and water for the lawns came all the way from the Colorado instead of from the nearby Pacific.

That was the trouble—his mind slipped back to the old days, his memories got out of sequence, and he wandered away from Recidivist Gardens, the only place he felt comfortable and at home. Dr. Tyson said it was because he had been in the field so long that time, twenty years ago.

A young man was staring at him, and Slick looked down at himself. No wonder the young man was staring! To his shame, Slick saw that he was wearing some kind of clothes, and worst of all, he was wearing them inside the city! Where had he found them? The only possible ex-

planation was that he had drawn them out on his museum card. These scrambled-sequence attacks were becoming more embarrassing each time!

"Don't act so flustered, Pop," the young man said. "Nobody saw you but me. Take 'em off and I'll put 'em in the lost-and-found chute for you. Or are you on your way to a costume ball?"

Slick looked over the railing of the balcony. There were several people waiting for elevators and radial cars on the level below, all decently naked, of course, but the young man was right. Nobody else had seen Slick's shame. Hurriedly, he stepped out of the uncomfortable clothes and rolled them into a bundle. The young man took it from him.

"You're very kind—thank you so much," Slick said.

"Think nothing of it," the young man said. "What address should I put on this stuff?"

"Just Recidivist Gardens. They'll take care of it in the office. I hope you don't think all of us at the Gardens do peculiar things like this. It's just that—well, it's a long story, but they didn't start my conditioning until I'd been in the blank five years. I'm not capable of anything really anti-social, you understand, but I get what they call sequence scrambles. Sometimes I act as if I were living in the

past. I'm not crazy, though. The doctors at the Gardens assure me I'm not crazy."

"Of course you're not," the young man said soothingly. "But that's a long blank—five years."

"I went the limit, really. Twenty years."

"Then you must be the man they call Slick!"

"You've heard of my case?"

"I was with you the night you made my father put us in the field."

"Dickie Porter! How you have grown! I've always told your father I didn't want to meet you. He said if it was going to happen, it would, whether he introduced us or not. But I hate to face you, after taking such a large slice out of your life—"

"But I'm still young. You're the one who's had the worst of it, because when you come out of the blank, you won't have so many years left. But you have the comfort of knowing you really did something worth while. Your case and mine have been invaluable to the research, particularly yours, because it was with you that my father developed the conditioning techniques. If it hadn't been for you, it would have been very difficult to find anyone willing to draw a twenty-year blank."

"No. Not even a lifer would want that. But I don't take any credit for it. I did it only because I was so bull-headed

I wouldn't listen to what Dr. Porter was trying to tell me."

"I came out of it six months ago," the young man said. "Now I can consciously hear, and feel, and smell, just like other people. I don't have to wait till tomorrow to remember what I said to somebody today, or what tonight's dinner tasted like."

"I'M SO glad to hear that!" Slick said. "Dr. Tyson says I should be coming out of it soon, too. Say, wait a minute—I heard what you said just now—I'm hearing what I said myself—why, I've had full sensory impressions for several minutes now, but it kind of sneaked up on me—"

The young man seized Slick's hand and pumped it vigorously. "Congratulations! You're out of it!"

"Oh, this is wonderful, wonderful! It's like—like coming back to life. I must go home and tell Dr. Tyson at once! Please go with me. It'll do you good to get out of the city. We're the only two people who've drawn such a long blank—we have so much in common. I'll fix you a chicken dinner. I raise my own. Just think, to taste my own fried chicken!"

"I wish I could go, but it'll have to be some other time. I have a date for the opera. When you see it on the Tri-dicast you'll know my girl and I are in the studio audience."

"Oh, a girl!" Slick said. "Of

course there'd be a girl, now that you're out of the blank. I won't keep you. But there's just one thing I must ask you—do you ever remember ahead? Consciously, that is?"

"A few times. But the conscious fore-memories are mixed with post-memories and impossible to place according to dates. It's the same objection that applies when people remember ahead in dreams—you don't know which part of the dream is a fore-memory until it happens."

"Maybe some day they'll learn to sort those conscious fore-memories out. If I could do it, I would know whether you are ever coming to see me."

"I will come," the young man promised. "Believe me, I will."

Absorbed in his newly found sensations, Slick took the elevator a hundred and thirty-three floors to ground level, reminding himself not to go too far and wind up in one of the sixty levels below ground. Then he stopped the North-by-Northwest radial car and punched the button for city limits, thus avoiding the necessity of dealing with the circle lettering system.

He sat in the speeding little car, watching the faces of the other passengers, until each, in turn, got off at their respective stops. Got off to go to luxurious apartments that were nothing more than cells, with

four-sided soundproofing separating neighbor from neighbor, with air, newspapers, prepared meals and all other deliveries coming by chute. How could they bury themselves in the ugly angularity of masonry and steel? How could they, who had always had full senses, deny themselves the sting of wind, the scent of soil and grass, the sound and sight of ocean breakers? How the world had changed in his lifetime, with people who had never committed anti-social acts imprisoning themselves, while those who had needed conditioning enjoyed the therapy of freedom.

When the car reached city limits, the door opened automatically and Slick, the only passenger left, passed through the shower that sprayed his skin with a porous, temporary plastic coating against the chill outside air. He walked across the thick ground-cover, exquisitely aware of the sensation of softness under his feet, leaving the awesome bulk of the city behind.

Before him swept the expanse of Recidivist Gardens, on gently rolling hills, bordering the sea. Clearly though he remembered it, this was the first time he had seen it with full and immediate sensory impact. The moon silvered the foliage, cast a path upon the water. Here and there, lights were on in the cottages nestled

among the foliage, the domed, transparent cottages that combined the psychological effect of living outdoors with the comfort of shelter. The sweet note of a bell buoy clove the night.

The beauty was almost unbearable, coming so sharply to long blanked-out senses. The return of immediate awareness, and the knowledge that Dickie Porter, the only human being with whom he had a kinship of experience, did not hate him, was too much happiness for one day. Slick breathed deeply of the salt air, and felt a catch in his heart. He raised a thin hand to his chest.

**T**HE young man who had spoken to Slick in the radial corridor found the obituary item in the newspaper he took from the chute with his breakfast next morning.

Louis G. Tennant, 65, known to his friends as "Slick," a resident of Recidivist Gardens, died of a heart attack about 2200 last night, while returning to his home after a visit to central Ellay.

Tennant was one of the first recidivists to benefit from the Porter socio-legal conditioning techniques, and was noted for his valuable contribution to science in volunteering in 1963 for a twenty-year blank. He was one of two men who have gone this far ahead, the other being Dr.

Porter's son, Richard S. Porter, Jr., level 72, SSE, circle XA, apt. 1722.

The Tennant case did much to direct public attention to the Porter techniques, helping to pave the way for a drastic revision of the criminal statutes, and to establish the concept that punishment rather than treatment for anti-social acts is as barbarous as punishment rather than treatment for the insane.

When informed of the death, and asked whether subconscious fore-memories of these developments motivated Tennant to volunteer as a research subject, Dr. Richard Porter, U.C.L.A., said that the effect of subconscious fore-memories as a compulsion to action is as yet imperfectly understood. He stated, however, that in certain individuals, the fore-memory compulsive factor appears to operate closer to the conscious level than in others. He said that, before going into the

blank, Tennant was noted for the strength and reliability of his "hunches." He also recalled that Tennant and Richard Porter, Jr., were the last two subjects treated in the original Metachronoscope, which was destroyed shortly thereafter in an explosion. Subsequent models have been modified and improved.

Tennant's estate was willed to the Recidivists' Christmas Fund for Dependent Children. According to Dr. Claude Tyson of Recidivist Hospital, Tennant was still in the blank when he died.

The closing sentence of the item was wrong, Dick Porter thought. In his last hours, Slick had known how it felt to be alive again, after twenty years.

Dick Porter was the only human being who fully appreciated what that meant.

**END**

## WHAT, NEVER?

A common belief among even the best educated and least dogmatic is that the human brain cannot possibly be outdone—ever—as the most compact computer.

But cryogenics may make the human brain seem wastefully huge and cumbersome. Researchers at MIT are experimenting with cryotrons as computer components—and cryotrons, being smaller than the visible wave length of light, are far tinier than neurons. If successful, cryogenic computers could be warehoused by the untold number in the space of a human skull, for they would truly be subminiaturized brains. And the data they contained would all be available, whereas 90% of the human brain is not used, and much of the working 10% is non-computing in function.

*There was nothing wrong with him that a Rider could not cure...and the rougher, the better!*

# THE LAST TRESPASSER

By JIM HARMON

**T**HEY would not believe Malloy was alone in there, in the padded cell. That made it worse.

Malloy was in his month for lying on his stomach to avoid bed sores. He was walking from Peoria, Illinois, to Detroit, Michigan, currently and he had just reached Chicago. It was fine to see State Street again, and the jewelry stores stuck in the alcoves of churches with the handsomely barred windows.

A man in Army-surplus green with an old library book was asking for carfare to a

hiring hall when they began opening the door.

Malloy rolled over on one elbow. It was peculiar. They hadn't done that for three years.

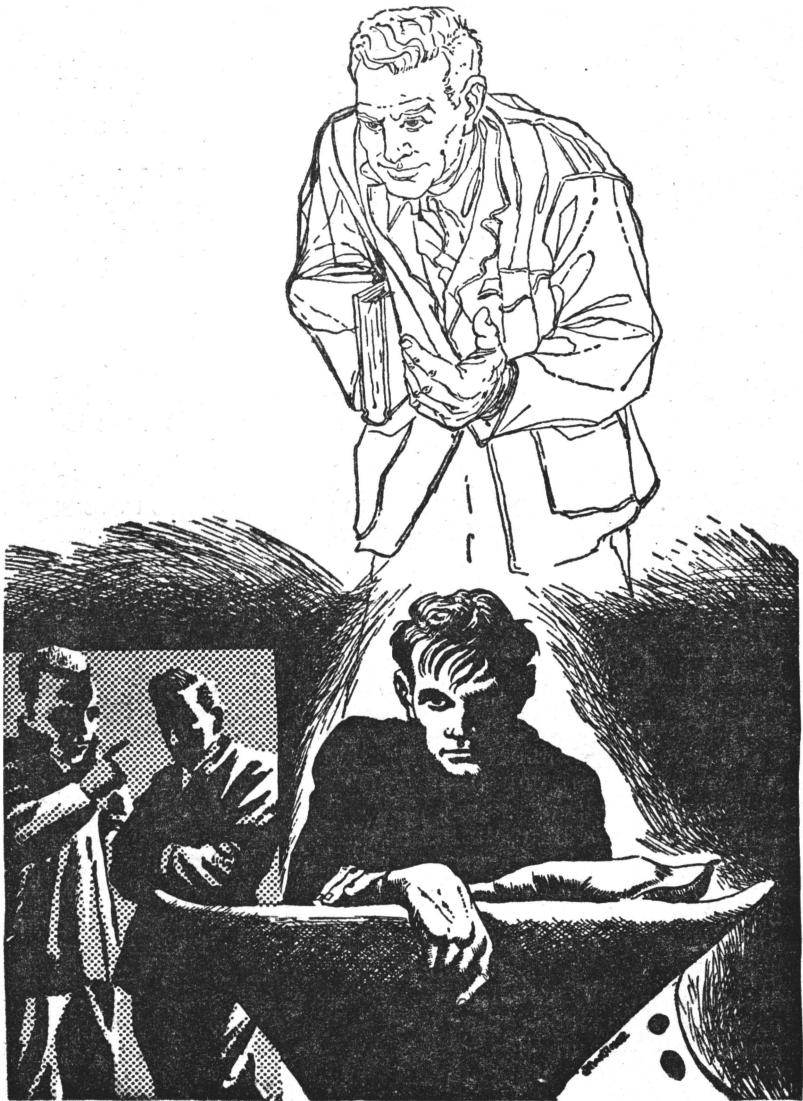
Two of them came inside, thick men with disinterested faces.

"Try no sudden moves," one of them advised him.

"We will anticipate you," the other one added.

Malloy went through the unfamiliar process of standing up. He looked at two men. "I wouldn't try anything against the four of you. I'm not *that* crazy."

"Time for an interrogation,



Malloy," the orderly said. "Come with us."

Malloy fell in between them and left the padded cell, frowning.

"What kind of an interrogation?" he asked them.

"What other kind?" one countered. "A sanity hearing."

He felt his eyebrows jerk. *His sanity?* He thought that had been established long ago. Or his lack of it.

**M**ALLOY remembered the doctor. He hadn't had much else to do for several years.

He was Dr. Heirson, a gray-ing man with starched face and collar. But the younger man sitting with Heirson behind the broad, translucent desk was a stranger to Malloy. He seemed to be a comic strip drawing, all in straight lines.

"Yes, sir."

"Step forward, Michael," Heirson said.

Malloy stepped forward. It had been a long time since he had been allowed to travel so far.

"Now relax, Michael," the doctor continued, leaning forward and grinning hideously. "All you have to do is tell me the truth."

"No, I don't, Doctor. I'm under no compulsion to tell you the truth. I'm perfectly capable of lying if it would do me any good."

"Hush that, Michael. You must not try to make believe

you can lie. I know you tell me only the truth."

"All right," Malloy said, exhaling deeply. "Believe that I speak only the truth if you like. But remember, I just told you that I'm a liar and that must be true."

Heirson blinked in watery confusion. He was obviously senile; only the old man's Rider kept him from coming apart at his mental seams.

The angle-faced man spoke into Heirson's ear. The old doctor continued to blink for a moment, then faced Malloy, the lines of his face drawn into an asterisk.

"What? You mean to tell me that you don't have an inner voice that urges you to tell the truth at all times?"

"No," Malloy explained, "I do not hear voices."

"You don't?"

"Never."

"And there is no inner sense that tells you when somebody is plotting against you?"

"Absolutely not."

"And when you are in trouble or danger, there is nothing that allows you to somehow look into the future or read minds or see through walls?"

"I can't do any of those things," Malloy stated.

Heirson threw up his hands. "Complete withdrawal from reality! Pathological! Why is he here anyway?"

The younger man grasped the withered thin upper arm and whispered audibly but



not understandably. Heirson's face eventually quivered back in line with Malloy's.

"Michael, do you know what year this is?" the doctor asked.

Malloy thought about that one. He wasn't absolutely certain, but he made some rapid calculations.

"1978?"

"1979! And what has been the single most important development in human history in recent times?"

Malloy sighed. He knew what he was expected to say.

"The coming of the Riders."

"And what are Riders?"

"Riders," Malloy recited patiently, "are elements of a symbiotic life-form. They have united with human beings to make one symbiotic creature. They have given much more than they have taken. All prominent religions recognize that they do not interfere with human free will. They have made us healthier, virtually immortal, and near supermen. The human race now is so much zoa, and every man is a zoon. Every man but me. *Damn it, I don't have any Rider!* I'm not a superman and I cannot get away with pretending to be one!"

Heirson oscillated his head. "Michael, Michael, your case isn't unique. There are others who claim that they have no Riders—usually maintaining that they are naturally superhuman and need no help from

some funny kind of foreigner. They are tolerated the same way, that B.R., we tolerated people who claimed they possessed psychic auras, or who got up in cathedrals and yelled that they had no souls. But you, Michael, are a troublemaker. You've been rude, vulgar, and reckless with your life and others in your pretense to be Riderless. Your pathological retreat from reality leaves us with no choice but to—"

The other man behind the desk shoved a paper in front of Heirson and tapped it forcefully with an index finger.

**H**EIRSON read the paper and his eyebrows went askew. "Yes, yes, we have discovered that there is a basic difference between you and the others who maintain they have no Riders. It would seem it *has* been established that you really *do not* have a Rider. Remarkable! Yes. Well, I have no alternative but to dismiss you from this institution, Michael Malloy, and to extend to you my personal apology for any inconvenience your three-and-a-half-years' detainment may have caused you."

A trick, Malloy thought.

Only what point would there be in tricking him?

The oppressive horror of it crushed down upon him with its full weight.

"Oh, no," he said. "No, sir."

Take me back to my padded cell. I've got my rights. I'm not going out there again. Maybe I could have learned to live with it once, but not now. I can't face up to living with a world of supermen, people who can do everything better than I can. *Take me back.* I think I'm going to get violent any minute now!"

He took a swing at the nearest guard, but naturally the guard's Rider told him what was coming and he dodged deftly, caught Malloy's arm and twisted it into half-nelson to hold him completely, infuriatingly helpless. Malloy had to hold back tears of frustration.

"Fortunately," Dr. Heirson croaked, "you can do no harm even if you do get violent, and I'm sure everyone will want to do everything possible for a poor unfortunate like yourself. We all will make allowances."

"No, no, no!" Malloy announced with the rhythm of his stomping feet. "I won't leave here! I *won't!*"

**T**HE man beside Heirson favored Malloy with a smile; Malloy wasn't sure whether it was friendly or mocking. The stranger nodded his head briefly to the guards.

Malloy was dragged, protesting, down the marble-floored hallway to the entrance of the mental hospital. His anguished cries echoed across

the ornate ceiling of the old building.

He was shoved out the front door with a parcel in brown paper under his arms.

Malloy made one desperate attempt to get back inside but the massive door clanged in his face, and he could hear the reverberations dying away inside and the steady retreat of footsteps.

Malloy turned away in pain from the unaccustomed brilliance and warmth of the sun and banged on the door with his fists and demanded to be readmitted.

He grew hoarser and hoarser and he slid further and further down until he was squatting on the threshold, his cheek rested against the warm varnished surface of the door.

Malloy had never been an overly proud or vain man before the Riders had come. After all, he'd had one of the most menial jobs on Earth; he had been a magazine editor. But now he felt squashed under the thumb of humiliation.

The monstrous indignity of it all!

To be thrown out of an asylum!

After a time, Malloy felt a coolness, a wetness on his head.

He dreamed a little dream to himself that he knew was a dream: they were coming to wrap him in warm sheets again.

But it was only a dream.

This wetness wasn't warm—it was chilly. He finally identified it from his memories. This was rain.

He stirred himself and gathered up the brown bundle that he knew must contain his suit, papers and a little money.

Malloy trudged down the road toward the town that lay below the sanitarium, his collar turned up.

He found he didn't mind the rain so much. It tended to settle the dust, and the walk would be a long one.

**G**RAYSON AMERY, the iron-haired publisher, greeted Malloy with a firm, warm, dry handshake.

"Michael, it's certainly good to see you again. You are looking well."

"Yes, the bruises left by the straitjacket straps don't show," said Malloy.

"A unique miscarriage of justice," Amery said.

"I certainly hope it's unique. I hope there aren't any more poor devils like me locked away."

Amery offered Malloy a chair with a broad, well-manicured hand. "I'm confident that there aren't. And you are out now, fortunately."

"You can call it fortune if you like," Malloy said uneasily.

"But you *are* glad to be out?"

Malloy hesitated. "I'm resigned to it. The flow of time

washed some of the salt out of the wound. Being born is definitely a traumatic experience."

"How well I remember!" Amery said.

Malloy glanced at him sharply, then eased back in his chair. Of course, like everybody else, thanks to his Rider, Amery had total recall. Malloy couldn't even remember his first birthday party.

"Is there any way I can be of help to you, Michael?" Amery went on.

"Sure. I want my job back."

Amery's forehead squeezed into lines of distress. "Yes, I was made aware of that. But, Michael, there have been a lot of changes in the publishing business since you were with us. For instance, it would be difficult for you to proofread a manuscript today."

"I'm hardly the type who can't spell. I haven't forgotten that."

"I know, Michael, but here—have a look at this."

Amery handed over a sheet of paper.

Malloy glanced at it. It seemed a typical sheet of a writer's manuscript, though a horrible yellowish gray that made the typescript from the tatters of a ribbon almost illegible. It was also smudged with jelly-doughnut fingerprints and there were several holes burned in it by droppings of cigarette ash. Pretty sloppy, but things didn't seem

to have changed much. Not until he read the paper.

—/Cynthia/—/ (walked)  
toward —/#((him))#/  
jauntily (/).

“‘Hi,’” —/she/—# called  
(out) to ((him)).

“‘/Hello/’, ‘Sweetstuff’,  
he / said /, ((trying)) to  
# sound # (gay) / . . .

Malloy looked up blankly. “What are all the cockeyed punctuation marks doing in there?” he asked.

Amery exhaled Havana smoke expansively. “That’s the way things are now, Michael. Those punctuation marks indicate whether the protagonist’s thoughts are self-directed or Rider-directed, or a combination of both, and which is dominant at the time, human or Rider. They became absolutely essential with the coming of the Riders.”

Malloy covered his lips with his fingers. “Of course, I don’t understand this punctuation now. But I could learn it quickly enough.”

The publisher shook his massive head. “No, you couldn’t learn it. You don’t have a Rider. You could never understand all the little subtleties.”

“I could fake it.”

“Never. It might get past the average reader, but the author and critics would know right away. All an editor can do is watch for typographical

errors and change them the way the author wanted them if his fingers hadn’t tripped over the wrong keys. As it was, we used to get a good many complaints from writers about you making changes in their work.”

“Grammar,” Malloy explained. “I got kind of a bug about grammar. I used to fix up manuscripts some.”

**R**UBBING out his fat cigar, Amery leaned across his desk. “This isn’t like the good old days when I started out, Mike. If I had my way today, I’d get the National Guard ordered out and have those miserable slobs grind out stories with a bayonet at their backs!” The red gleam dimmed in Amery’s eyes. “Those were the days, by God! Back then you didn’t edit manuscripts with any dinky little blue pencil—you used a razor blade and a grease stick!”

Amery slumped down in his swivel, his eyes now only embers. “But that day is over, Mike. Writers have their rights, damn them. You get the wrong punctuation in one of their private-eye epics, Mike, and one of them will slap a suit against the company for defacing a Work of Art, and both of us could land in jail.”

“Westerns,” Malloy suggested in desperation. “Historical fiction. They can’t

employ the new punctuation. I could edit them."

The veteran publisher shook his head again. "No. Cowboys in westerns today turn your stomach more than ever with their damned nobility and purity. Heroines in historical novels act just as if deodorants and Living Bras had been in use back then. And these stories are written as if the characters *did* have Riders, with only a few minor concessions."

"Okay." Malloy stood up. "I'll go quietly."

"Maybe you're lucky, Mike," Amery said up at him. "I remember old-fashioned ideals like privacy and free will and free enterprise. They don't exist any more. You can't tell me that my free will hasn't been affected. Why, every business deal I've had since the Coming has been strictly ethical. You know that isn't like me!"

"No," Malloy admitted thoughtfully.

"I'm even so ethical now that I recognize I owe you something. I know money can't repay—"

"Hell it can't," Malloy said quickly.

The publisher stripped off a sheaf of bills with deliberation.

Malloy pocketed them. Enough to keep him eating for a couple of months. After that, there was always the Salvation Army. He didn't

have anything to worry about, really.

"Amery, what would *you* do if you were in my place?" he heard himself ask suddenly.

AMERY steepled his fingers. "I hesitate to suggest a deception to anyone, but since you ask me what I would do if I didn't have a Rider, I will tell you the truth: I would pretend that I did not have a Rider."

"What are you talking about? I *don't* have a Rider. So far as I myself personally know, I'm the only person in the whole damned world that doesn't have one. I'd like to find out why, but I'm no scientist. So I just have to live with it. Or without it."

"There's a very, very fine difference," Amery pointed out with one finger. "Semantics is no longer a living science since the Coming, but I'll try to make myself clear. You must pretend to have to pretend that you don't have a Rider. Join the Jockey Set."

"Jockey Set," Malloy mumbled, massaging the back of his neck. "I've been put away for three and a half years. What's the Jockey Set?"

"Jockeys are characters who pretend that they don't have Riders, that they are self-sufficient human beings. Sometimes they use their Riders' powers and claim to be natural supermen. Some-

times they leave Rider power untapped and pretend to be natural, old-type human beings. But they are all fakes. The Rider in them comes out sooner or later."

"But if they have Riders, will I be able to fool them into thinking I'm only pretending to be without one?"

Amery lifted his shoulders and drew down the corners of his mouth. "Who knows? I will tell you this, though—you must be pretty much of a blank to a Rider. If they won't touch you, it must mean they can't."

Malloy started to ask him how he knew what Riders felt about him, then thought better of it.

"How would I fake trying to hide the fact that I didn't have a Rider? I suppose, maybe, by slipping up and letting myself predict the future or something . . ."

"That's it!" Amery beamed. "You see? It will be easy!"

"Of course," Malloy said dully.

"I mean, that is to say, any time you don't do something and don't do it particularly well, the Jockeys will only admire your splendid act."

Malloy nodded thoughtfully. He turned and shook hands with the publisher. "Well, Amery, thanks for the money—and the advice. You always were the most devious master of deceit I ever knew."

"Thank you," Amery said with great sincerity.

"There's one more thing. This may sound silly, but they found me out pretty quick after it happened. What does a Rider look like? Where do they come from? Where do they fasten onto the brain or body of human beings?"

Amery leaned across the desk and backhanded Malloy in the mouth.

"Get out!" Amery said.

Malloy left the office, holding a handkerchief to his cut lip.

**I**T WAS a dump. The name had changed a half dozen times over the last half century, but the spots in the tablecloths remained the same. The dump had seen the Lost Generation, the Beat Generation, and now the Riderless Generation.

Only, Malloy supposed, they called themselves the Riderless Generation. Well, maybe they were. Maybe they were like him.

He walked in, hanging onto that thought, his stride long. He cut down his stride. At that rate he would be out in the alley soon.

Self-consciously, Malloy slid into a chair at a vacant table so he wouldn't draw undue attention.

As he began idly tracing the grease spots on the tablecloths that looked like the

wrappers from a line of cereal boxes, all red and white checks, he discovered every shaved head in the room was triangulating him.

He shifted uncomfortably. He was playing it middle-of-the-road. He had a close crew-cut and wore a plaid flannel shirt and purple velvet ballet leotards. Maybe he was too far on the conservative side for here.

"Spell it, saddle," the counterman called to him without coming front.

"Cola," he ordered. "With chickory, pecans and honey."

"One sou'easter on the path," the counterman called out tiredly.

"With you're going to sit there, He?" a liquid female voice flowed into his ear.

"With I'm doing it, She," Malloy said, not turning.

She eased around in front of the table. She was red-haired and built, wearing black leotards and a coat of black enamel.

"Your pupils are going to wear me away," the redhead said.

"I've only got eyes. How else can I read you?"

"That is Truth. Tru-u-th."

The counterman set out Malloy's drink. "It's waiting for you, saddle. Don't tease it or it'll bite."

He went for the cola and brought it to the table.

"You came back?" she said.

He pulled up his chair. "I

always come back. You can risk money on it. Saddle up?"

"Saddle before the post, my touchstone."

THE girl sat down. Her green eyes were moving, always moving, but mostly over Malloy, his chair, the table. "You going to keep possession here long?"

"I don't know any reason why not," said Malloy.

"Of course you don't!" she snapped. "Only—they close at five."

"The billboard gives it two dozen hours a day."

"They trim a little off at five. To sweep the floors and change the tablesprouds."

"Change 'em from one table to another," Malloy jibed.

"You formed it. Clean ones in front, dirty ones in the shadows. Let's try breathing air," she suggested.

"Wait'll we gate up. I've got pecans to drink."

The counterman's hawking laugh filled the room. "Let him wait, Mandy. I might as well wait to later to sweep it in."

Her face caught fire for an instant. "The Board of Health don't go away just because you can read their dirty minds."

"So take him out," the counterman snarled.

Malloy suddenly decided he had played hard to get long enough. This was his first

chance to get in with the Jockeys. From what he had heard, they had some kind of underground set-up to help their own in business and the arts. He needed that help.

"Let's lope," he said, pushing his chair back and leaving silver on the table for the drink and a tip.

He touched the girl's lacquered arm and steered her toward the door.

Behind him, the floor fell in.

Ripping, tearing, rendering, splintering, crashing, crushing, reverberating bedlam!

Of course, it couldn't have been the floor caving in, Malloy thought as he turned to see a great hole where the floor had disappeared.

The hole was where the table and chair he had been using had stood a moment before.

Flapping at the sides of the cave-in were innumerable thicknesses of linoleum, and between each one an incredible accumulation of filth and debris—O. Henry candy bar wrappers, a cover from a *Collier's*, a booklet on the new Packard ("Ask the Man Who Owns One"), a newspaper article on Flo Ziegfeld's girls (stop thinking in slogans), but mostly just dirt—dust, webs, lint, filth. There had been no boards under the table; the ends of the exposed boards weren't freshly broken but old and rotted porously

smooth. Only the linoleum and the dirt had supported the table for years.

Malloy edged closer and saw some broken sticks lying on a jagged pile of coke standing out black in the darkness far below.

The redhead pulled him back from the edge, her fingers digging into his biceps, writhing with a strange passionate intensity, as if she were trying to knead him into a layer for a pie.

"With you're a REAL Jockey. He, a REAL Jockey, a REAL ONE. *Truth!* I'm going to take you to the Commissioner, He, the Commissioner in his saddle."

Somehow, uncertain, yet surely, Malloy was dimly pleased at this.

"DON'T say it," the fat man remarked, glancing up for an instant, then lowering his eyes to the splay of papers on his desk. "No esoteric jargon, please."

"All right," Malloy said readily. "Shall I sit down?"

"By all means, saddle up." A second chin trembled. "Damn it, there I go. Have a chair."

Malloy took the only chair not piled down with books, or maps, or correspondence, or manuscripts, or notes. It had a straight back and a plastic seat, piously uncomfortable.

The big man looked up a second time and folded rows



of pink sausages complacently. "So you want to be a Jockey, eh?"

Malloy thinned his lips and licked the insides of them, making a snap judgment. "Not really. I don't have a Rider, and I want what help the Jockeys can give me. I'm not particularly anxious to acquire introverted slang and a shaved head, but if that goes along with the help..." He spread his hands eloquently.

"So you don't think you have a Rider?"

Malloy didn't know how to answer that. "I don't think I have a Rider," he repeated without inflection.

"I don't think I have a Rider, either—only I know I do," the fat man said.

Malloy stood up elaborately. "You dirty steed."

"Oh, sit down, Malloy, sit down. I'm a Jockey like the rest of you. There's only one difference. I *know* I'm sick. I've got a Rider and all its powers, but I could no more use them than an acrophobe could climb a ladder up the Empire State to get at a naked princess sitting on a bag of gold."

Malloy eased back down onto the chair and shook his head slowly. "That *would* be a hell of a way to be."

The big man slammed down two hams made out of fists. "You are exactly the same way, sonny boy! Only

you don't know any better."

Malloy swallowed. The man known as the Commissioner might be right at that. "Have it your way," Malloy said. "But I sure *think* I don't have a Rider."

The Commissioner smirked. Malloy knew what that meant. He knew men like the fat boy; he understood them. He had had Grayson Amery, Dr. Heirson—he knew the breed.

"What are you holding back on me?" Malloy demanded.

"Malloy, do you even know what a Rider is?"

Malloy paused. Then, "No, I don't."

"I thought not. Shall I tell you?"

"I imagine you were planning to."

The Commissioner braced his fists on the work surface of the desk and lifted his bulk halfway from the chair. "The Riders are a disease. Like rabies."

Malloy cleared his throat. "That's one way to look at them."

"Don't be servilely civil to me. That is an accurate, clinical description of the Riders—they are a cerebral infection."

"You mean their powers of emergency telepathy and precognition, their seeming secondary personality—all that's a hallucination?"

Malloy was fevered as he asked it. It was at last some

confirmation of his own theory. The whole world was sick, except him.

"That is exactly what I *don't* mean," the Commissioner said contemptuously. "The Riders are real entities, capable of real miracles so far as we are concerned. But they aren't mammals, or insects, or pure energy forms—they are viruses."

"Viruses that can think?" Malloy asked, aghast.

"No. No one unit of the strain can think, but *chains* of them can. Together they form different combinations and responses, like analog components or brain synapses. Objectively, they are an infection that can enter the body anywhere but that always spread to the prefrontal lobes—like rabies. Only they don't destroy tissue; the Riders are benign parasites."

"That's one word for them," Malloy admitted. "But if they are a virus, there must be antibodies—is that the word?—for them?"

The fat man snorted unpleasantly. "You can't fight an infection that is smart enough to consciously change its shape and fight back. Natural adaptation and mutation are tough enough. Besides, nobody would stand for being cured of his Rider, any more than you would let me 'cure' you of having eyes."

"Then what was your point in telling me the nature of the

Riders? You weren't merely conducting an adult education class."

"True." The Commissioner burped delicately and settled back in his chair. "As a matter of fact, there is one thing I left out: the Riders aren't suited for Earth. They have difficulty in adapting themselves to live on this planet. Once they get into a human being, they are okay. But before that they are weak and have to get hothouse care. Exactly that—*hothouse care*."

Malloy's tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. He pulled it loose and said, "And you can break the windows of hothouses!"

The Commissioner smiled. It was unpleasant to watch.

"**N**OTHING personal, Malloy," the Commissioner whispered almost subvocally as they lay together in the green ooze, "but we haven't known you long enough to give you our trust. The first false step will be a long one for you—exactly six feet."

Malloy tried to squint through the foggy darkness, and almost instantly gave it up. "You can't blame me for everything, Commissioner. I told you I wasn't convinced that some of the Riders in there won't precog our plans to save themselves."

"All the ones we are going to destroy are the unhooked-up ones. They can't send any-

thing any more than one unattached telephone could. They aren't really very good with their psi powers. It's strictly an emergency talent, like our sudden spurts of adrenalin."

He gave an unsatisfied grunt and bellied forward.

Up ahead of Malloy, the Commissioner and an unstable stable of Jockeys who had been coming into town for weeks lay the secret hatchery of unhosted Rider viruses. They could only multiply beyond a certain self-maintaining balance inside the human body, and had to be grown in cultures on Earth, outside the healthy climate of a null-gravity, radiated vacuum in space.

It was the Commissioner's plan to destroy all the virus cultures, so that in eighteen years or so there would come along a Rider-free generation to outnumber the minor supermen still infected by the Riders.

Malloy had a lot of doubts about the plan, but he was willing to go along for his own reasons.

During the past few weeks of indoctrination and commando training, Malloy had had time to think. It hadn't taken nearly that long to figure out the Commissioner.

The Commissioner was simply a man who had to have power, and he couldn't stand for a whole human race

to be more powerful than he was, just because of a lack within himself. He was out to pull everybody down to his level, so he could stand out again and take over.

Still, Malloy thought, I may have something to say about that.

The men and a few women crawled through the semi-tropical Florida mud toward the low buildings glimmering in the light from the thin crescent of moon.

Malloy elbowed a foot closer to the hothouse breeding factory, up to here in stinking muck. Any second now, he thought, somebody is going to roll over on a cottonmouth.

"Ready with your cloths," a man next to him relayed, first catching his attention and mostly lip-synching it.

Malloy dug out his Asphixion pad, and readied the tab to pull off the plastic coating. Clamped over the guards' faces, the catalytic agent would rapidly absorb the men's oxygen. With a partial vacuum in the mouth and larynx, no cries could carry and the victim would rapidly black out.

The pad would be removed and the guards would be allowed to catch up on their air intake. They wouldn't be harmed in any way final, so their emergency psi warning system wasn't supposed to cut in.

Malloy shrugged.

The plan would never work.

It was based on equal parts of megalomania and wishful thinking.

Malloy's only problem was when and how to best expose the plot before it was found out without his help.

He couldn't stand up and shout a warning. If he tried that, one of the fanatic Jockeys was sure to clamp an Asphixion pad over his face, and, with him, they might not be considerate enough to remove it.

Only a treacherous, self-seeking rat would even think of exposing these poor misguided people and betraying his own race to some extra-terrestrial viruses.

Malloy's elbows slipped out from under him and he went face first into the mud.

He forced himself to keep from spluttering and lifted his head. *Where had that idea come from?*

**F**OR one adrenalin-charged moment, he thought he had finally acquired a Rider.

But no. A Rider would hardly urge him to carry out an attack against the citadel of existence to its own kind. It had to be something simpler, more elemental than that.

The voice had been his own conscience crying out against treason.

He followed the probable train of circumstances if he heeded his conscience.

He would most probably be killed in this useless attack. He doubted that this was the *only* breeding chamber for Riders, or, that if it were, the Riders safely in human bodies couldn't transplant part of themselves and start new cultures.

If he wasn't killed, he would probably be returned to his cell, his padded cell, by Rider-ridden people.

If he were somehow let off, he would be left to wander the streets, a public ward.

The trouble with his conscience was that it wasn't logical—and it had a poor memory.

It didn't recall those three and a half years mislaid in an asylum.

*Only an unprincipled—*

Malloy shut it off and felt a drop of sweat running down the deep crevices between his eyebrows. My only problem, he reminded himself again and again, is how and when to expose this raid before they discover it without my help.

The solution bloomed in his mind.

It was remarkable how well the human mind could operate under stress.

He half-rose from the mud so he would be silhouetted to anybody watching, and fell back.

The guards hadn't spotted him, but he heard the Jockeys scurrying toward him through the mud.

The squishing halted near him.

He waited.

The commandos moved ahead, leaving him behind.

When he felt it was safe, Malloy took the Asphixion pad off his face—a pad without the transparent plastic coat being pulled off.

He made out a buddy team of Jockeys almost on top of the first Rider-ridden manned post. All the others had to be far ahead . . .

Malloy leaped to his feet—or tried to. He managed to slosh to his knees.

*"Raid!"* he screamed. *"Jockeys are raiding the hothouse!"*

The lights flared up, a magnesium, Fourth-of-July night glare. Guards with guns sprang from everywhere. The guns went into action. Clouds of crystalline Asphixion snowed down on the raiders.

From far back, Malloy watched in satisfaction.

The sound came from behind him.

The Commissioner blobbed forward, a distorted ball of slimy mud.

"I will crush you under my foot like a bloated white grub!" the fat man announced with sincerity.

Malloy's eyes narrowed in the darkness.

"Stay away from me, Commissioner, or I'll push you down—way, way down!"

The blocky figure retreated a step, quivering impotently.

Malloy nodded to himself.

The Commissioner had spoken too knowingly of a terrible fear of falling.

THE interrogator was the younger man who sat next to Dr. Heirson during Malloy's release from the hospital.

"I feel you'd like to know my identity, Mr. Malloy. My name is Pearson; I work for the federal government. Now would you tell me just what you hoped to gain by betraying the assault force of Jockeys?"

It was the crux of the matter.

Malloy took a deep breath and said it.

"I want a Rider. I want to be like everybody else. If you people have any sense of gratitude and justice—and you seem to—you'll set up some kind of scientific project to find out why I haven't caught a case of Riders and to see that I am properly infected."

Pearson leaned back in the other straight chair inside the rough-boarded outbuilding.

"Mr. Malloy, we *know* why none of the Riders who drifted in from outer space infected you. You already *had* a Rider—an entirely human, not alien, one. You are schizoid—you have a split personality. You adjusted to it to an incredible degree and submerged it, but it was still there and no alien would touch a man who already had two minds."

Malloy felt no emotion, only an inescapable acceptance. "My conscience," he said.

Pearson nodded. "Your second personality is becoming steadily less recessive."

"But telepathy—all the tricks of the Riders—I can't do them."

"You will be able to. Two minds *are* better than one. It would seem that schizophrenia is the natural state of supermen, when properly trained and integrated. In fact, you should be able to accomplish more than a Rider-ridden man—you will have two human personalities, and the Riders are little more than viruses conscious of their own existence."

"You mean I'm a *superman*?"

"Yes. But unfortunately you are a threat to the present order because of your non-Rider attitude. You are being returned to your padded cell. There are guards outside. I hope you will walk out quietly to meet them."

Malloy walked out quietly to meet the guards who would take him away. On his way out, he met Grayson Amery coming in.

Pearson shook hands warmly with the publisher.

"Mr. Amery, the government owes you a vote of

thanks for recommending Malloy for this job of infiltrating the Jocks. Turning against one of your own kind is never easy . . ."

Amery laughed lightly. "Malloy was not 'one of my kind.' He was an editor. Even worse than that, I think in his attitude he always remained no more than a writer. I understand he is being returned to confinement?"

Pearson looked troubled. "Yes, sir. Personally, I would feel more comfortable if he were eliminated. I am not at all sure that we can keep Malloy under lock and key once he develops his potential of schizophrenia."

"I know. Unhappily, the primitive ethics of the Riders prevent our taking care of Mike in the most efficient way. That's what I wanted to talk to you about. May I sit down?"

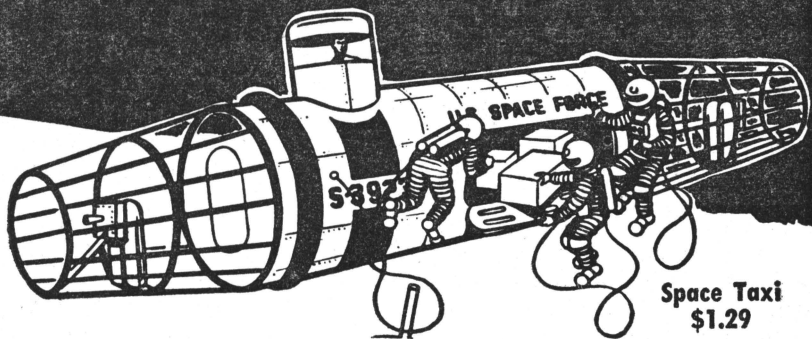
"Please do, sir," said Pearson.

Amery took the vacant chair and leaned forward with boyish enthusiasm.

"Mr. Pearson, I have faith in humanity. I believe we can keep the benefits of any situation, including the Riders, and eliminate the disadvantages and limitations. My boy, all of us must start to work to find a way to override the Riders!"

**END**

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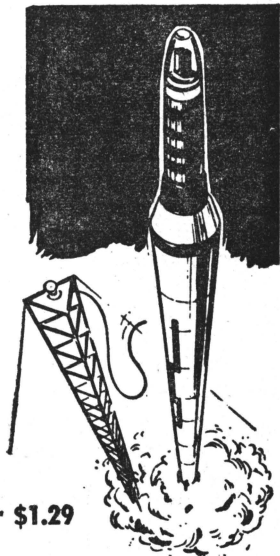
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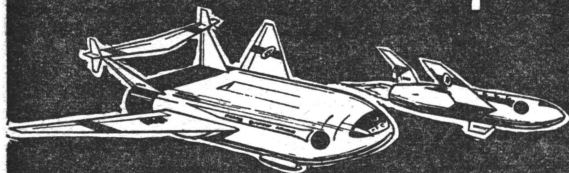
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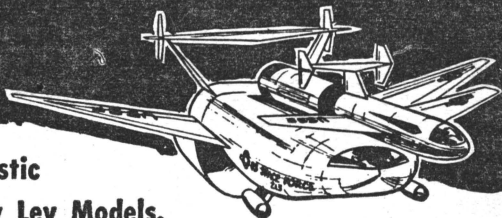
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*The biggest blackmail stunt  
ever, it relied on no skeleton  
in the closet. This had . . .*

## the Martian in the Attic

By FREDERIK POHL

Illustrated by MORROW

**D**UNLOP was short and pudgy; his eyelashes were blond and his hair was gone. He looked like the sort of man you see sitting way off at the end of the stadium at the Big Game, clutching a hot dog and a pennant and sitting with his wife. Who would be making him explain every play. Also he stuttered.



The girl at the reception desk of LaFitte Enterprises was a blue-eyed former model. She had Dunlop catalogued. She looked up slowly. She said bleakly: "Yes?"

"I want to see Mr. LaF-F-F—" said Dunlop, and paused to clear his throat. "I want to see Mr. LaFitte."

The ex-model was startled enough to blink. *Nobody* saw Mr. LaFitte! Oh, John D. the Sixth might. Or President Brockenheimer might drop by, after phoning first. Nobody else. Mr. LaFitte was a very great man who had invented most of America's finest gadgets, and sold them for some of America's finest money, and he was not available to casual callers. Particularly nobodies with suits that had come right off a rack.

The ex-model was, however, a girl with a sympathetic heart—as was known only to her mother, her employer and the fourteen men who, one after another, had broken it. She was sorry for Dunlop. She decided to let the poor jerk down easy and said: "Who shall I say is calling, sir? Mr. Dunlop? Is that with an 'O,' sir? One moment." And she picked up the phone, trying not to smile.

The reception room was carpeted in real Oriental wool—none of your flimsy nylon or even LaFitton!—and all about it were the symbols of LaFitte's power and genius. In a

nook, floodlighted, stood an acrylic model of the LaFitte Solar Transformer, transparently gleaming. On a scarlet pedestal in the center of the room was the LaFitte Ion-Exchange Self-Powered Water Still, in the small or forty-gallon-a-second model. (Two of the larger size provided all of London with sparkling clear water from the muddy, silty, smelly Thames.)

Dunlop said hoarsely: "Hold it a second. Tell him that he won't know my name, but we have a mutual friend."

The ex-model hesitated, struggling with a new fact. That changed things. Even Mr. LaFitte might have a friend who might by chance be acquainted with a little blond nobody whose shoes needed shining. It wasn't likely, but it was a possibility. Especially when you consider that Mr. LaFitte himself sprang from quite humble origins: at one time he had taught at a university.

"Yes, sir," she said, much more warmly. "May I have the friend's name?"

"I d-don't know his name."

"Oh!"

"But Mr. LaFitte will know who I m-mean. Just say the friend is a M— is a M— is a M-Martian."

The soft blue eyes turned bleak. The smooth, pure face shriveled into the hard *Vogue* lines that it had possessed before an unbearable interest in

chocolate nougats had taken her from before the fashion cameras and put her behind this desk.

"Get out!" she said. "That isn't a bit funny!"

The chubby little man said cheerfully: "Don't forget the name, Dunlop. And I'm at 449 West 19th Street. It's a rooming house." And he left. She wouldn't give anyone the message, he knew, but he knew comfortably that it didn't matter. He'd seen the little gold-plated microphone at the corner of her desk. The LaFitte Auto-Sec it was hooked up to would unfailingly remember, analyze and pass along every word.

"Ho-hum," said Dunlop to the elevator operator, "they make you fellows work too hard in this kind of weather. I'll see that they put in air-conditioning."

The operator looked at Dunlop as though he was some kind of a creep, but Dunlop didn't mind. Why should he? He *was* a creep. But he would soon be a very rich one.

**H**ECTOR DUNLOP trotted out into the heat of Fifth Avenue, wheezing because of his asthma. But he was quite pleased with himself.

He paused at the corner to turn and look up at the LaFitte Building, all copper and glass bands in the quaint period architecture that LaFitte liked. Let him enjoy it,

thought Dunlop generously. It looks awful, but let LaFitte have his pleasures; it was only fair that LaFitte have the kind of building he wanted. Dunlop's own taste went to more modern lines, but there would be nothing to stop him from putting up a hundred-and-fifty-two-story building across the street if he liked. LaFitte was entitled to everything he wanted—as long as he was willing to share with Hector Dunlop. As he certainly would be, and probably that very day.

Musing cheerfully about the inevitable generosity of LaFitte, Dunlop dawdled down Fifth Avenue in the fierce but unfelt heat. He had plenty of time. It would take a little while for anything to happen.

Of course, he thought patiently, it was possible that nothing would happen at all today. Whatever human the Auto-Sec reported to might forget. Anything might go wrong. But still he had time. All he had to do was try again, and try still more after that if necessary. Sooner or later the magic words would reach LaFitte. After eight years of getting ready for this moment it didn't much matter if it took an extra day or two.

Dunlop caught his breath.

A girl in needle-pointed heels came clicking by, the hot breeze plastering her skirt against her legs. She glanced casually at the volume of space

which Hector Dunlop thought he was occupying and found it empty. Dunlop snarled out of habit; she was not the only hormone-pumping girl who had seen nothing where he stood. But he regained his calm. To hell with you, my dear, he said good-humoredly to himself. I will have you later if I like. I will have twenty like you, or twenty a day if I wish. Starting very soon.

He sprinted across Forty-second Street, and there was the gray familiar old-fashioned bulk of the Library.

On a sentimental impulse he climbed the steps and went inside.

The elevator operator nodded. "Good afternoon, Mr. Dunlop. Three?"

"That's right, Charley. As usual." They all liked him here. It was the only place in the world where that was true, he realized, but then he had spent more time here than anywhere else in the world.

Dunlop got out of the slow elevator as it creaked to an approximate halt on the third floor. He walked reminiscently down the wide, warm hall between the rows of exhibits. Just beyond the drinking fountain there. That was the door to the Fortescue Collection. Flanking it were the glass cabinets that housed some of Fortescue's own Martian photographs, along with the unexplained relics of a

previous race that had built the canals.

DUNLOP looked at the prints and could hardly keep from giggling. The Martians were seedy, slime-skinned creatures with snaky arms and no heads at all. Worse, according to Updyke's *The Martian Adventure*, Fortescue's own *First to Land* and Wilbert, Shevelsen and Buchbinder's *Survey of Indigenous Martian Semi-Fauna* (in the *Proceedings of the Astro-Biological Institute* for Winter, 2011), they smelled like rotting fish. Their mean intelligence was given by Fortescue, Burlutski and Stanko as roughly equivalent to the *Felidae* (though Gaffney placed it higher, say about that of the lower primates). They possessed no language. They did not have the use of fire. Their most advanced tool was a hand-axe. In short, the Martians were the dopes of the Solar System, and it was not surprising that La-Fitte's receptionist had viewed describing a Martian as her employer's friend as a gross insult.

"Why, it's Mr. Dunlop," called the librarian, peering out through the wire grating on the door. She got up and came toward him to unlock the door to the Fortescue Collection.

"No, thanks," he said hastily. "I'm not coming in

today, Miss Reidy. Warm weather, isn't it? Well, I must be getting along."

When hell freezes over I'll come in, he added to himself as he turned away, although Miss Reidy had been extremely helpful to him for eight years; she had turned the Library's archives over to him, not only in the extraterrestrial collections but wherever his researching nose led him. Without her, he would have found it much more difficult to establish what he now knew about LaFitte. On the other hand, she wore glasses. Her skin was sallow. One of her front teeth was chipped. Dunlop would see only TV stars and the society debutantes, he vowed solemnly, and decided that even those he would treat like dirt.

The Library was pressing down on him; it was too much a reminder of the eight grub-like years that were now past. He left it and took a bus home.

Less than two hours had elapsed since leaving LaFitte's office.

That wasn't enough. Not even the great LaFitte's organization would have been quite sure to deliver and act on the message yet, and Dunlop was suddenly wildly anxious to spend no time waiting in his rooming house. He stopped in front of a cheap restaurant, paused, smiled broadly and walked across

the street to a small, cozy, expensive place with potted palms in the window. It would just about clean out what cash he had left, but what of it?

Dunlop ate the best lunch he had had in ten years, taking his time. When some fumbling chemical message told him that enough minutes had elapsed and he walked down the block to his rooming house, the men were there.

The landlady peered out of her window from behind a curtain, looking frightened.

Dunlop laughed out loud and waved to her as they closed in. They were two tall men with featureless faces. The heavier one smelled of chlorophyll chewing gum. The leaner one smelled of death.

Dunlop linked arms with them, grinning broadly, and turned his back on his landlady. "What did you tell her you w-were, boys? Internal Revenue? The F.B.I.?" They didn't answer, but it didn't matter. Let her think what she liked; he would never, never, never see her again. She was welcome to the few pitiful possessions in his cheap suitcase. Very soon now Hector Dunlop would have only the best.

"YOU don't know your boss's secret, eh?" Dunlop prodded the men during the car ride. "But I do. It took me eight years to find it

out. Treat me with a little respect or I m-might have you fired."

"Shut up," said chlorophyll-breath pleasantly, and Dunlop politely obeyed. It didn't matter, like everything else that happened now. In a short time he would see LaFitte and then—

"Don't p-p-push!" he said irritably, staggering before them out of the car.

They caught him, one at each elbow, Chlorophyll opening the iron gate at the end of the walk and Death pushing him through. Dunlop's glasses came off one ear and he grabbed for them.

They were well out of the city, having crossed the Hudson. Dunlop had only the haziest sense of geography, having devoted all his last eight years to more profitable pursuits, but he guessed they were somewhere in the hills back of Kingston. They went into a great stone house and saw no one. It was a Frankenstein house, but it cheered Dunlop greatly, for it was just the sort of house he had imagined LaFitte would need to keep his secret.

They shoved Dunlop through a door into a room with a fireplace. In a leather chair before a fire (though the day was hot) was a man who had to be Quincy LaFitte.

"Hello," said Dunlop with poise, strutting toward him.

"I suppose y-you know why I— Hey! What are you d-doing?"

Chlorophyll was putting one gray glove on one hand. He walked to a desk, opened it, took out something—a gun! In his gloved hand he raised it and fired at the wall. *Splat*. It was a small flat sound, but a great chip of plaster flew.

"Hey!" said Dunlop again.

Mr. LaFitte watched him with polite interest. Chlorophyll walked briskly toward him, and abruptly Death reached for—for—

Chlorophyll handed Dunlop the gun he had fired. Dunlop instinctively grasped it, while Death took out another, larger, more dangerous-looking one.

Dunlop abruptly jumped, dropped the gun, beginning to understand. "Wait!" he cried in sudden panic. "I've g-g—" He swallowed and dropped to his knees. "Don't shoot! I've g-got everything written d-down in my luh—in my luh—"

LaFitte said softly: "Just a moment, boys."

Chlorophyll just stopped where he was and waited. Death held his gun competently on Dunlop and waited.

Dunlop managed to stammer: "In my *lawyer's* office. I've got the whole th-thing written down. If anything happens to me he ruh—he ruh—he *reads* it."

LaFitte sighed. "Well," he said mildly, "that was the chance we took. All right, boys. Leave us alone." Chlorophyll and Death took their scent and their menace out the door.

Dunlop was breathing very hard. He had just come very close to dying, he realized; one man handed him the gun, and the other was about to shoot him dead. Then they would call the police to deliver the body of an unsuccessful assassin. Too bad, officer, but he certainly fooled us! Look, there's where the bullet went. I only tried to wing the poor nut, but— A shrug.

Dunlop swallowed. "Too bad," he said in a cracked voice. "But naturally I had to take p-precautions. Say. Can I have a drink?"

Mr. LaFitte pointed to a tray. He had all the time there was. He merely waited, with patience and very little concern. He was a tall old man with a very bald head, but he moved quickly when he wanted to, Dunlop noticed. Funny, he hadn't expected LaFitte to be bald.

But everything else was going strictly according to plan!

**H**E POURED himself a stiff shot of twelve-year-old bourbon and downed it from a glass that was Steuben's best hand-etched crystal.

He said: "I've got you, LaFitte! You know it, don't you?"

LaFitte gave him a warm, forgiving look.

"Oh, that's the boy," Dunlop enthused. "B-Be a good loser. But you know I've found out what your fortune is based on." He swallowed another quick one and felt the hot burning tingle spread. "Well. To b-begin with, eight years ago I was an undergrad at the university you taught at. I came across a reference to a thesis called *Certain Observations on the Ontogenesis of the Martian P-Paraprimates*. By somebody named Quincy A. W. L-LaFitte, B.S."

LaFitte nodded faintly, still smiling. His eyes were tricky, Dunlop decided; they were the eyes of a man who had grown quite accustomed to success. You couldn't read much into eyes like those. You had to watch yourself.

Still, he reassured himself, he had all the cards. "So I l-looked for the paper and I couldn't f-find it. But I guess you know that!" Couldn't find it? No, not in the stacks, not in the Dean's file, not even in the archives. It was very fortunate that Dunlop was a persistent man. He had found the printer who had done the thesis in the first place, and there it was, still attached to the old dusty bill.

"I remember the w-words,"

Dunlop said, and quoted from the conclusion. He didn't stutter at all:

"It is therefore to be inferred that the Martian paraprimate at one time possessed a mature culture comparable to the most sophisticated *milieux* of our own planet. The artifacts and structural remains were not created by another race. Perhaps there is a correlation with the so-called Shternweiser Anomaly, when conjecturally an explosion of planetary proportions depleted the Martian water supply.'"

LaFitte interrupted: "Shternweiser! You know, I had forgotten his name. It's been a long time. But Shternweiser's paper suggested that Mars might have lost its water in our own historical times—and then the rest was easy!"

Dunlop finished his quotation:

"In conjunction, these factors inescapably suggest a pattern. The Martian paraprimate requires an aqueous phase for development from grub to imago, as in many terrestrial invertebrates. Yet there has not been sufficient free water on the surface of Mars since the time of the Shternweiser explosion theory. It seems likely, therefore, that the present examples surviving are mere sexed grubs, and that the adult

Martian paraprimate does not exist *in vivo*, though its historical existence is attested by the remarkable examples left of their work.'"

"And then," finished Dunlop, "you b-began to realize what you had here. And you d-destroyed all the copies. All, th-that is, b-but one."

**I**T WAS working! It was all working the way it should!

LaFitte would have thrown him out long ago, of course, if he had dared. He didn't dare. He knew that Dunlop had followed the long, crooked trail of evidence to its end.

*Every invention that bore the name LaFitte had come from a Martian mind.*

The fact that the paper was suppressed was the first clue. Why suppress it? The name attached to the paper was the second—though it had taken an effort of the imagination to connect a puny B.S. with the head of LaFitte Enterprises.

And all the other clues had come painfully and laboriously along the trail that led past Miss Reidy's room at the Library, the Space Exploration wing of the Smithsonian, the Hall of Extraterrestrial Zoofarms at the Museum of Natural History, and a thousand dusty chambers of learning all over the country.

LaFitte sighed. "And so you know it all, Mr. Dunlop. You've come a long way."



He poured himself a gentlemanly film of brandy in a large inhaler and warmed it with his breath. He said meditatively: "You did a lot of work, but, of course, I did more. I had to go to Mars, for one thing."

"The *S-Solar Argosy*," Dunlop supplied promptly.

LaFitte raised his eyebrows. "*That* thorough? I suppose you realize, then, that the crash of the *Solar Argosy* was not an accident. I had to cover up the fact that I was bringing a young Martian back to Earth. It wasn't easy. And even so, once I had him here, that was only half the battle. It is quite difficult to raise an exogenous life-form on Earth."

He sipped a drop of the brandy and leaned forward earnestly. "I had to let a Martian develop. It meant giving him an aqueous environment, as close as I could manage to what must have been the conditions on Mars before the Shternweiser event. All guesswork, Mr. Dunlop! I can only say that luck was with me. And even then—why, think of yourself as a baby. Suppose your mother had abandoned you, kicking and wetting your diaper, on Jupiter. And suppose that some curious-shaped creature that resembled Mommy about as much as your mother resembled a tree then took over your raising."

He shook his head solemnly.

"Spock was no help at all. The problem of discipline! The toilet training! And then I had nothing but a naked mind, so to speak. The Martian adult mind is great, but it needs to be filled with knowledge before it can create, and that, Mr. Dunlop, in itself took me six difficult years."

He stood up. "Well," he said, "suppose you tell me what you want."

Dunlop, caught off base, stammered terribly: "I w-w-want half of the tuh—of the tuh—"

"You want half of the take?"

"That's ruh—that's—"

"I understand. In order to keep my secret, you want me to give you half of everything I earn from my Martian's inventions. And if I don't agree?"

Dunlop said, suddenly panicked: "But you *must*! If I t-t-tell your secret, anyone can do the same!"

LaFitte said reasonably: "But I already have my money, Mr. Dunlop. No, that's not enough of an inducement . . . But," he said after a moment, "I doubt that such a consideration will persuade you to keep still. And, in fact, I do want this matter kept confidential. After all, six men died in the crash of the *Solar Argosy*, and on that sort of thing there is no statute of limitations."

He politely touched Dun-

lop's arm. "Come along. You deduced there was a Martian in this house? Let me show you how right you were."

**A**LL the way down a long carpeted corridor, Dunlop kept hearing little clicks and rustles that seemed to come from the wall. "Are those your b-bodyguards, LaFitte? Don't try any tricks!"

LaFitte shrugged. "Come on out, boys," he said without raising his voice; and a few feet ahead of them a panel opened and Death and Chlorophyll stepped through.

"Sorry about that other business, Mr. Dunlop," said Chlorophyll.

"No hard f-feelings," said Dunlop.

LaFitte stopped before a door with double locks. He spun the tumblers and the door opened into a dark, dank room.

"V-r-r-rooom, v-r-r-room." It sounded like a huge deep rumble from inside the room.

Dunlop's pupils slowly expanded to admit more light, and he began to recognize shapes.

In the room was a sort of palisade of steel bars. Behind them, chained to a stake, was—

A Martian!

*Chained?*

Yes, it was chained and cuffed. What could only be the key hung where the Martian would be able to see it always

but reach it never. Dunlop swallowed, staring. The Martians in Fortescue's photographs were slimy, ropy, ugly creatures like thinned-out sea anemones, man-tall and headless. The chained creature that thundered at him now was like those Martians only as a frog is like a tadpole. It possessed a head, round-domed, with staring eyes. It possessed a mouth that clacked open and shut on great square teeth.

"V-r-r-room," it roared, and then Dunlop listened more closely. It was not a wordless lion's bellow. It was English! The creature was talking to them; it was only the Earth's thick atmosphere that made it boom. "Who are you?" it croaked in a slobbery-drunk Chaliapin's boom.

Dunlop said faintly: "God b-bless." Inside that hideous skull was the brain that had created for LaFitte the Solar Transformer, the Ion-Exchange Self-Powered Water Still, the LaFitte Negative-Impedance Transducer, and a thousand other great inventions. It was not a Martian Dunlop was looking at; it was a magic lamp that would bring him endless fortune. But it was an ugly nightmare.

"So," said LaFitte. "And what do you think now, Mr. Dunlop? Don't you think I did something great? Perhaps the Still and the Transducer were his invention, not mine. But I invented *him*."

Dunlop pulled himself together. "Y-yes," he said, bobbing his head. He had a concept of LaFitte as a sort of storybook blackmail victim, who needed only a leer, a whisper and the Papers to start disgorging billions. It had not occurred to him that LaFitte would take honest pride in what he had done. Now, knowing it, Dunlop saw or thought he saw a better tactic.

He said instantly: "Great? N-No, LaFitte, it's more than that. I am simply amazed that you brought him up without, say, r-rickets. Or juvenile delinquency. Or whatever Martians might get, lacking proper care."

LaFitte looked pleased. "Well, let's get down to business. You want to become an equal partner in LaFitte Enterprises, is that what you're asking for?"

Dunlop shrugged. He didn't have to answer. That was fortunate; in a situation as tense as this one, he couldn't have spoken at all.

LaFitte said cheerfully: "Why not? Who needs all this? Besides, some new blood in the firm might perk things up." He gazed benevolently at the Martian, who quailed. "Our friend here has been lethargic lately. All right, I'll make you work for it, but you can have half."

"Th— Th— Thank—"

"You're welcome, Dunlop. How shall we do it? I don't

suppose you'd care to take my word—"

Dunlop smiled.

**L**AFITTE was not offended. "Very well, we'll put it in writing. I'll have my attorneys draw something up. I suppose you have a lawyer for them to get in touch with?" He snapped his fingers. Death stepped brightly forward with a silver pencil and Chlorophyll with a pad.

"G-G-Good," said Dunlop, terribly eager. "My l-lawyer is P. George Metzger, and he's in the Empire State Building, forty-first fl—"

"*Fool!*" roared the Martian with terrible glee. LaFitte wrote quickly and folded the paper into a neat square. He handed it to the man who smelled of chlorophyll chewing gum.

Dunlop said desperately: "That's not the s-same lawyer."

LaFitte waited politely. "Not what lawyer?"

"My *other* lawyer is the one that has the p-p-papers."

LaFitte shook his head and smiled.

Dunlop sobbed. He couldn't help it. Before his eyes a billion dollars had vanished, and the premium on his life-insurance policy had run out. They had Metzger's name. They knew where to find the fat manila envelope that contained the sum of eight years' work.

Chlorophyll, or Death, or any of LaFitte's hundreds of confidential helpers, would go to Metzger's office, and perhaps they would present phony court orders or perhaps they would bull their way through, a handkerchief over the face and a gun in the hand. One way or another they would find the papers. The sort of organization that LaFitte owned would surely not be baffled by the office safe of a recent ex-law clerk, now in his first practice.

Dunlop sobbed again, wishing he had not economized on lawyers; but it really made no difference. LaFitte knew where the papers were kept and he would get them. It remained only for him to erase the last copy of the information—that is, the copy in the head of Hector Dunlop.

Chlorophyll tucked the note in his pocket and left. Death patted the bulge under his arm and looked at LaFitte.

"Not here," said LaFitte.

Dunlop took a deep breath.

"G-Good-bye, Martian," he said sadly, and turned toward the door. Behind him the thick, hateful voice laughed.

"You're taking this very well," LaFitte said in surprise.

Dunlop shrugged and stepped aside to let LaFitte precede him through the doorway.

"What else can I d-do?" he said. "You have me cold. Only—" The Death man was

through the door, and so was LaFitte, half-turned politely to listen to Dunlop. Dunlop caught the edge of the door, hesitated, smiled and leaped back, slamming it. He found a lock and turned it. "Only you have to c-catch me first!" he yelled through the door.

Behind him the Martian laughed like a wounded whale.

"You were very good," complimented the thick, tolling voice.

"It was a matter of s-simple s-self-defense," said Dunlop.

**H**E COULD hear noises in the corridor, but there was time. "N-Now! Come, Martian! We're going to get away from LaFitte. You're coming w-with me, because he won't dare shoot you and— And certainly you, with your great mind, can find a way for us both to escape."

The Martian said in a thick sulky voice: "I've tried."

"But I can help! Isn't that the k-k-key?"

He clawed the bright bit of metal off the wall. There was a lock on the door of steel bars, but the key opened it. The Martian was just inside, ropy arms waving.

"V-r-r-room," it rumbled, eyes like snake's eyes staring at Dunlop.

"Speak more c-clearly," Dunlop requested impatiently, twisting the key out of the lock.

"I said," repeated the thick

drawl, "I've been waiting for you."

"Of course. What a t-terrible life you've led!"

*Crash* went the door behind him; Dunlop didn't dare look. And this key insisted on sticking in its lock! But he freed it and leaped to the Martian's side—at least there they would not dare fire, for fear of destroying their meal-ticket!

"You c-can get us out of here," Dunlop panted, fumbling for the lock on the Martian's ankle cuff and gagging. (It was true. They did smell

like rotting fish.) "B-but you must be strong! LaFitte has been a father to you, but what a f-false f-father! Feel no loyalty to him, Martian. He made you his slave, even if he d-did keep you healthy and s-sane."

And behind him LaFitte cleared his throat. "But I didn't," he observed. "I didn't keep him sane."

"No," rumbled the thick, slow Martian voice. "No, he didn't."

The ropes that smelled like rotting fish closed lovingly and lethally around Dunlop.

**END**

## SUPERWEAPON

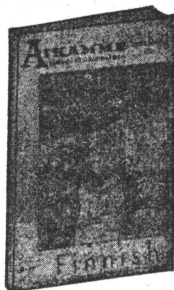
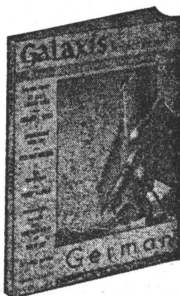
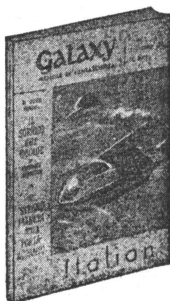
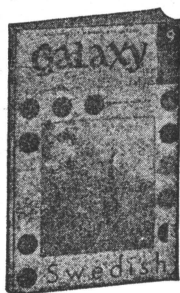
Few foes have been as great a challenge to man's claim to supremacy on this planet as insects, and few, including perhaps his own kind, have inflicted such huge losses in life, health and wealth. Hands, swatters and drainage got a big assist in insect poisons, especially recently. But the tiny, deadly enemy has the advantage of brief generations; survival of the fittest has produced insecticide-resistant strains. And poisons aimed at insects all too often hit other forms of life, including ourselves, by getting into food and drinking water.

Newest weapon in the insect war is sex. Totally selective, it can destroy only one or another species, not the beneficial as well as the destructive.

The method itself is simpler by far than any other. Great numbers of the males of any chosen kind of insect are sterilized by cobalt-60 radiation, and dropped into infested areas at breeding time. The sterilized males, says Dr. Arthur Lindquist, entomologist of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, "compete very successfully with the normal ones. The average result is that 60 to 70 per cent of the eggs laid are sterile and won't hatch." Repeated at each breeding season, the end result is total extermination in plague sections, with especial success on islands like Rota, near Guam, where weekly drops of three million sterile male fruit flies for a year should wipe out the devourers of its melons.

For the first time in the history of mankind, complete—and completely safe—extinction of insect pests appears to be a realistic possibility.

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# Worlds of if

Book Reviews by Frederik Pohl

**C**ONSIDER a story in which the mutated crew of an interstellar derelict forget that they are on a ship and revert to savagery; it is not Robert A. Heinlein's *Universe*. Consider a story in which mutated, intelligent rats strive for control of a spaceship against its human crew; it is not A. Bertram Chandler's *Giant Killer*.

These ingredients—as well as a good many others of reminiscent flavor—form *Starship*, a first novel by Brian Aldiss (Signet).

*Starship* is described on its cover by a single, bare-faced adjective: "magnificent." This is an exaggeration. But Aldiss comes very close indeed to deserving such a word! The book is vital. It is impossible to forget its precursors, but as the story builds and grows, we no longer worry about them. This is no dreary rehash; this is a novel of taste and perception.

*Starship's* rats, once we realize that they are not the same as *Giant Killer's*, become worthy inventions. They carry telepathic rabbits with them in their wars, for interrogating human POWs. Their scouts are telepathic moths: a

part of their lineage might well be Ralph Milne Farley's "new-souls" of a generation back, but these moths are described in terms and with emotions that Farley never evoked.

Indeed, *Starship's* second flaw is an error on the side of the angels: its invention is over-abundant; there is so much in the book that Aldiss lets us glimpse a treasure only to whisk it away. His telepathic bunny is a triumph of compassionate characterization . . . shown once, never seen again. There is a novel tribal game, hinting at provocative changes in social behavior. But the first match we see is the last one.

No matter. Roy Complain, *Starship's* hero, battles his way through the ponc-tangled jungles of the corridors, past human and non-human foes to the enemy country called "Forwards" . . . to the semi-mythical Control Room itself . . . and finally to a denouement that is skillful, fast and convincing. And we are with him all the way. Magnificent? No, the word is too strong. But it is only an exaggeration, not an outright lie.

It is good to know that this first novel is shortly to be followed by at least two more in this country. Brian Aldiss shows every sign of being a writer of imagination and power; it will not need much to make him one of the great ones.

**A** YEAR or so ago the Seminar Committee of Princeton University invited Kingsley Amis (a name which seldom appears in print without the immediate addition of the phrase, "one of England's Angry Young Men") to deliver a series of lectures in Princeton's Christian Gauss Seminars in Criticism. Amis accepted, and for his subject elected to discuss science fiction in its modern form.

It is not on record whether the Seminar Committee was pleased or otherwise at his choice. But it is known, first, that Princeton's faculty turned out in large number for the seminars when, in early 1959, they were delivered and, second, that the faculty was nearly crowded out by the influx of editors and publishers from New York and Philadelphia anxious to get an authoritative fresh view on just what it was that they themselves were doing.

Harcourt, Brace has now made it possible for those who missed the seminars to get that view all the same, now

enlarged, indexed, handsomely bound and available to all in book form under the title, *New Maps of Hell*. Examinations of science fiction have appeared often in the past decade, but this is not merely the newest of them. It is the best.

Amis is himself a novelist—*Lucky Jim*, *That Uncertain Feeling*, etc. He is also a critic of substance, a poet, a jazz buff and a playwright (in which mood he wrote one of the few science fiction plays ever to find a home on the B.B.C.'s Third Programme). But these considerations are mostly irrelevant. *New Maps of Hell* demonstrates its authority at once. It proceeds immediately to a lucid and entertaining exposition of just what its author seeks in a science fiction story, and a summary of what any person of similar tastes will reliably find.

It is not necessary to accept every one of Amis's estimates. He is an Angry Young Man, as much as any writer of talent can be said to be any one thing, and what interests him most is the science fiction of comment, preferably social comment. Disagreement only indicates that one starts from other interests. Still, his estimates are formed with great care, and the test of a theory is the accuracy of the deductions that can be drawn from it. For example,



this reviewer is prepared to testify that Amis's deductions, as they relate to such "behind-the-scenes" matters as questions of intent and of the relative contributions of partners in a collaboration, are of a previously unprecedented accuracy.

Amis, like any true lover, neither demands perfection nor overlooks flaws. His conclusion is that science fiction is indeed worth while, containing in it something of special value which is not to be found, except in trace quantities, anywhere else at all. "In the first place," he says, "one is grateful for the presence of science fiction as a medium in which our society can criticize itself, and sharply . . . In the second place, one is grateful that we have a form of writing which is interested in the future, which is ready . . . to treat as variables what are usually taken to be constants, which is set on tackling those large, general, speculative questions that ordinary fiction so often avoids. This is no less true when all allowance has been made for the shock and pain felt by some when they find those questions answered in a way that does much less than justice to their complexity. Most answers to anything are overwhelmingly likely to be crude, and I cannot bring myself to believe that the most saturating barrage of

crude answers really menaces the viability of the sensitive and intelligent answer; if that were the way the world worked, it would long since have stopped working altogether . . . We could do with more, not less, of that habit of mind which will look beyond the attempted solution of problems already evident to the attempted formulation of problems not yet distinguishable. That is the path which science fiction . . . is just beginning to tread, and if it can contrive to go on moving in that direction, it will not only have secured its future, but may make some contribution to the security of our own."

**I***n The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction (Ninth Series)* (Doubleday), Robert P. Mills gives us sixteen stories, a smattering of short poems and an unfortunately large number of flatulent jokes in the "Adventures of Ferdinand Feghoot" series. The level is high, though the Old Reliables on his list—Heinlein, Tenn, Bester, Sturgeon, Knight—mostly turn in inferior performances. Heinlein's "*All You Zombies*—" is a smoking room joke warped into the semblance of a story; Tenn's *Eastward Ho!* with great labor nails down every implication to be found in the speculation that we may one day have to give America

back to the Indians; Bester, almost always brilliant, is in *The Psi Man* only flashy; Sturgeon is opaque in his exercise in metafiction, *The Man Who Lost the Sea!* and only Knight's *What Rough Beast?* has the simultaneous qualities of competence, power and scope that we have a right to expect from all of these. In *What Rough Beast?*, Knight creates what is probably his finest character, a mutant—or perhaps a Messiah—who can create worlds and destroy them.

Good as it is, *What Rough Beast?* may not be quite the best story in the book. Two powerful contenders are Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*, the rise and fall of a laboratory-produced superman, and R. M. McKenna's *Casey Agonistes*, a fantasy laid in the terminal lung-disease ward of a V. A. hospital. There are other attractive entries by Jane Rice and Avram Davidson, but there are also half a dozen of the Feghoot jokettes, in which some 150 words are used to enchain a sitting duck, at which a gassy pun is fired. (Sample: "Bards of a fetter flog to get 'er," says Feghoot of a whipping contest among pilloried poets with a virgin as the prize.)

For comparison, Ace has just reissued the *Third Series* of the same, containing stories by Farmer, Gresham, de Camp-Pratt, Bester and

Boucher, among others. The stories date from the series' sugar-coated period. They are charming, competent and guaranteed roughage-free. They are also quite forgettable. It may be that even Ferdinand Feghoot is not too high a price to pay for progress.

OTHER reissues include Robert A. Heinlein's *Methuselah's Children* (Signet), not the best of the future histories but still a fine evening's reading. The first half is a tightly plotted, carefully detailed story of immortals among humanity, with their problems and plans. The second, unhappily, becomes a sort of wishy-washy travelogue . . . Bantam has reissued Agnew H. Bahnson, Jr.'s *The Stars Are Too High*, a story of a flying saucer which has not even the virtue of extra-terrestrial origin to relieve its dullness. . . . A more impressive reprint is Tom Godwin's *Space Prison* (Pyramid), which is his 1958 Gnome Press novel, *The Survivors*. Godwin imagines that a band of interstellar pioneers, marooned on an almost uninhabitable planet by a conquering, superpowerful race of aliens, can in several centuries so improve their physical strength and resourcefulness as to gull, trap and finally defeat these aliens—first their scout ship (with bare hands), ultimately

their whole blooming empire. Now this is preposterous. Yet Godwin miraculously brings it all off. The people become real. Their scrabbling battle for survival excites compassion and respect. And, when they win, it is a most hard-shelled reader who will not rejoice.

Signet, under its new "Signet Classics" imprint, has put back in print sixteen fine books. Brontë, Dickens, Tolstoy and such make up most of their list, but among the sixteen are *Gulliver's Travels*, Virginia Woolf's delightful and strange *Orlando*, and George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Each book contains a critical or reminiscent introduction or postscript, and the packages are handsomely dressed.

**D**O THEY esp or do they cheat? In *The Mind Readers* (Doubleday), S. G. Soal and H. T. Bowden make no bones about it: They say their subjects esp. Said subjects are a pair of Welsh teen-agers with surly dispositions, a propensity for faking results when they think they can get away with it and a spy-proof secret code for communication between themselves—the Welsh language, "which few Englishmen can ever learn." Nevertheless, their cheating seems to have occurred at only one brief period. (Youthful mischief?)

Their dispositions and their bilingualism make the tests more difficult but do not invalidate them. And, over a series of more than 17,000 tests, the boys produced higher-than-chance recognition of Rhine-type ESP cards with astonishing reliability. These were not mere squiggles on the graph, six right, seven right. These were 20 out of 25, 21 out of 25—on two occasions, 25 out of 25 trials!

As reading matter, the book's minutely pettifogging precision of statement makes it downright tiresome. A redeeming human sidelight comes in the collection of commentaries by other parapsychologists appended to the book. J. B. Rhine was one of those invited to comment; here, nettled, he thanks Dr. Soal for the invitation. It is, he says, "a compliment I appreciate. I say this because, in his private correspondence and published statements over the years, Dr. Soal has been, at one stage or another, one of the most harshly unfavourable (and, to my mind, unfair) among the critics of the researches with which I have been associated." And Dr. Soal's own researches, Rhine reflects, look "disproportionately large to him and the work of everyone else comparatively small and distorted . . . But, I am inclined to think, it may be that this very capacity for intense pre-occu-

pation with one's own inquiry to the exclusion of everybody else's is necessary to this man."

**I**N *Strange World of the Moon* (Basic Books), V. A. Firsoff combines a scrupulous reporting of virtually every recorded fact about our biggest and oldest satellite with an equally scrupulous but clearly mind-made-up weighing of the theories that explain them. The Moon did not, he says, come out of the basin of the Pacific. Its craters were not, he says, formed either by meteorite impact or by the flow of molten rock from Earth-type volcanoes. It was indeed something like volcanic action that did it, he says, but the differences are so considerable that he will not call the things "volcanoes" at all, preferring the coined word "lunavoes," vents from the Moon's interior which release gas and a sort of warmish mud.

Firsoff's Moon is, as he says, "a living world, (not) the conventional idea of a ball of terrestrial rocky desert raised to a high atmospheric level and made to revolve once a month." It is a world of color (red, blue, green, violet, brown and yellow have all been observed) and of change (features disappear, markings alter shape and color). Firsoff has his own explanations for much of these

curiosities, but he is also faithful in transmitting the theories put forth by others, including Pickering's conjecture that the changes in markings around the crater Eratosthenes may be caused by "'small animals' moving at a rate of 6 inches per hour."

To the lay reader Firsoff is most persuasive, and he is gifted with the most pleasurable capacity for being both complete and clear. Short of tomorrow's actual landings, this is the best estimate we can form of Luna, its terrain and (so says Firsoff, again fully persuasive) its very possible plant and animal life.

**J**OHN Brunner's *Slavers of Space* and Philip K. Dick's *Dr. Futurity* combine in an Ace double volume of not quite total merit. Brunner starts with a pleasure-mad Earth, amply fed and served by colonies and robots. Earthmen spend most of their time in a wild carnival (described with ingenuity) and are viewed with great scorn by the other worlds in the Galaxy (invented with thought and originality). There are, however, in addition to the robots, certain blue-skinned creatures called androids, perfectly human in every respect save color and a complete deficiency of civil rights: they can be killed, tortured, enslaved. A son of an ex-

tremely wealthy Earth family forsakes pleasure and determines to end the abuses of the android trade.

After some satisfactory adventures, though, Brunner's invention deserts him and the story takes a "surprise" twist which we cannot approve (as flimsy) and may not discuss (as giving away the payoff).

An analogous fault mars Philip K. Dick's equally inventive *Dr. Futurity*. A 21st century doctor is snatched by a time machine into a still farther future, the death-loving world of the year 2405, where his healing skill is considered a foul perversion, and he is at once entrapped into a complicated net of underground activities.

The death-lovers have been constructed with attention to those corroborative details which give artistic verisimilitude, and thus Dick's narrative is neither bald nor unconvincing. It is quite convincing. It is even hairy. What flaws the story is a really excessive troweling-on of time paradoxes, so that most everybody turns out to be most anybody else. . . . In mediocre stories neither of these endings would do any great harm; but the bulk of these works is very far above mediocre.

**A**NOTHER Ace double volume gives us a double dose of Harlan Ellison. One side is *The Man with Nine*

*Lives*, described as a "novel." It might more aptly be called a bag of tricks. Its plot line is complicated beyond any reasonable demand an author might make on a reader, causing its hero to assume totally irrelevant identities and work toward totally unconnected purposes, apparently for the sake of using up some old wordage lying around in the form of unrelated novelettes.

The flip side is a collection of small, violent short stories under the title, *A Touch of Infinity*. A feature of this collection is the introductory paragraph which Ellison has written for each story, giving us either insight into his creative process ("It is always wise for the writer to consciously haul himself up short by the shift key and write a change of pace story"), a comment on the vexed conflict between author and editor ("I let him stick his own title on it, and since it was better, anyhow, what the hell") or a glimpse of the early struggles of the artist ("Who the hell ever thought I'd wind up making my bread pounding a typewriter?"). The stories themselves are light-years above the novel on the other side. With less rope, Ellison succeeds in getting less tangled, and these are first-rate of their type. Their type is blood and thunder.

**END**

*There couldn't be a better tip-off system than mine—it wasn't possible—but he had one!*

# THE NON-ELECTRONIC BUG

Illustrated by MORROW

By E. MITTLEMAN

**I** WOULDN'T take five cents off a legitimate man, but if they want to gamble that's another story.

What I am is a genius, and I give you a piece of advice: Do not ever play cards with a stranger. The stranger might be me. Where there are degenerate card players around, I sometimes get a call. Not dice—I don't have a machine to handle them. But with cards I have a machine to force the advantage.

The first thing is a little radio receiver, about the size of a pack of cigarettes. You don't hear any music. You feel it on your skin. The next

thing is two dimes. You stick them onto you, anywhere you like. Some like to put them on their legs, some on their belly. Makes no difference, just so they're out of sight. Each dime has a wire soldered to it, and the wires are attached to the little receiver that goes in your pocket.

The other thing is the transmitter I carry around.

My partner was a fellow named Henry. He had an electronic surplus hardware business, but business wasn't good and he was looking for a little extra cash on the side. It turns out that the other little wholesalers in the loft building

where he has his business are all card players, and no pikers, either. So Henry spread the word that he was available for a gin game—any time at all, but he would only play in his own place—he was expecting an important phone call and he didn't want to be away and maybe miss it. . . . It never came; but the card players did.

I was supposed to be his stock clerk. While Henry and the other fellow were working on the cards at one end of the room, I would be moving around the other—checking the stock, packing the stuff for shipment, arranging it on the shelves, sweeping the floor. I was a regular model worker, busy every second. I had to be. In order to see the man's hand, I had to be nearby, but I had to keep moving so he wouldn't pay attention to me.

And every time I got a look at his hand, I pushed the little button on the transmitter in my pocket.

Every push on the button was a shock on Henry's leg. One for spades, two for hearts, three for diamonds, four for clubs.

Then I would tip the card: a short shock for an ace, two for a king, three for a queen, and so on down to the ten. A long and a short for nine, a long and two shorts for an eight . . . it took a little memorizing, but it was worth it. Henry knew every card the

other man held every time. And I got fifty per cent.

**WE DIDN'T** annihilate the fish. They hardly felt they were being hurt, but we got a steady advantage, day after day. We did so well we took on another man—I can take physical labor or leave it alone, and I leave it alone every chance I get.

That was where we first felt the trouble.

Our new boy was around twenty. He had a swept-wing haircut, complete with tail fins. Also he had a silly laugh. Now, there are jokes in a card game—somebody taking a beating will sound off, to take away some of the sting, but nobody laughs because the cracks are never funny. But they were to our new boy.

He laughed.

He laughed not only when the mark made some crack, but a lot of the time when he didn't. It got so the customers were looking at him with a lot of dislike, and that was bad for business.

So I called him out into the hall. "Skippy," I said—that's what we called him, "lay off. *Never* rub it in to a sucker. It's enough to take his money."

He ran his fingers back along his hair. "Can't a fellow express himself?"

I gave him a long, hard unhealthy look. *Express* himself? He wouldn't have to. I'd

express him myself—express him right out of our setup.

But before I got a chance, this fellow from Chicago came in, a big manufacturer named Chapo; a wheel, and he looked it. He was red-faced, with hanging jowls and a big dollar cigar; he announced that he only played for big stakes . . . and, nodding toward the kid and me, that he didn't like an audience.

Henry looked at us miserably. But what was he going to do? If he didn't go along, the word could spread that maybe there was something wrong going on. He had to play. "Take the day off, you two," he said, but he wasn't happy.

I thought fast.

There was still one chance. I got behind Chapo long enough to give Henry a wink and a nod toward the window. Then I took Skippy by the elbow and steered him out of there.

Down in the street I said, fast: "You want to earn your pay? You have to give me a hand—an eye is really what I mean. Don't argue—just say yes or no."

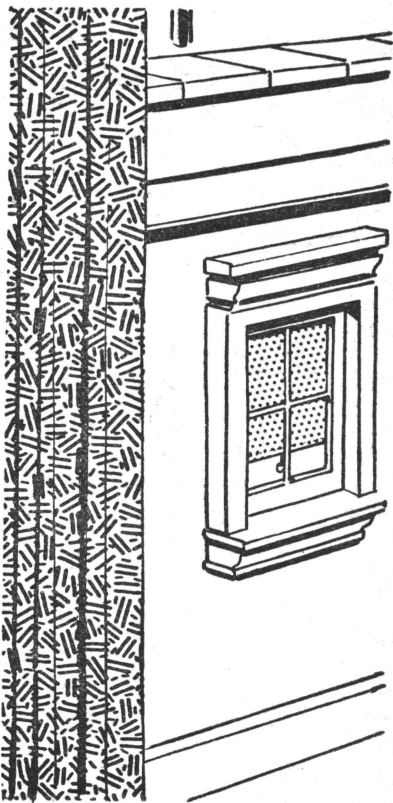
He didn't stop to think. "Sure," he said. "Why not?"

"All right." I took him down the street to where they had genuine imported Japanese field glasses and laid out twenty bucks for a pair. The man was a thief, but I didn't have time to argue. Right

across the street from Henry's place was a rundown hotel. That was our next stop.

The desk man in the scratch house looked up from his comic book. "A room," I said. "Me and my nephew want a room facing the street." And I pointed to the window of Henry's place, where I wanted it to face.

Because we still had a chance. With the field glasses and Skippy's young, good eyes



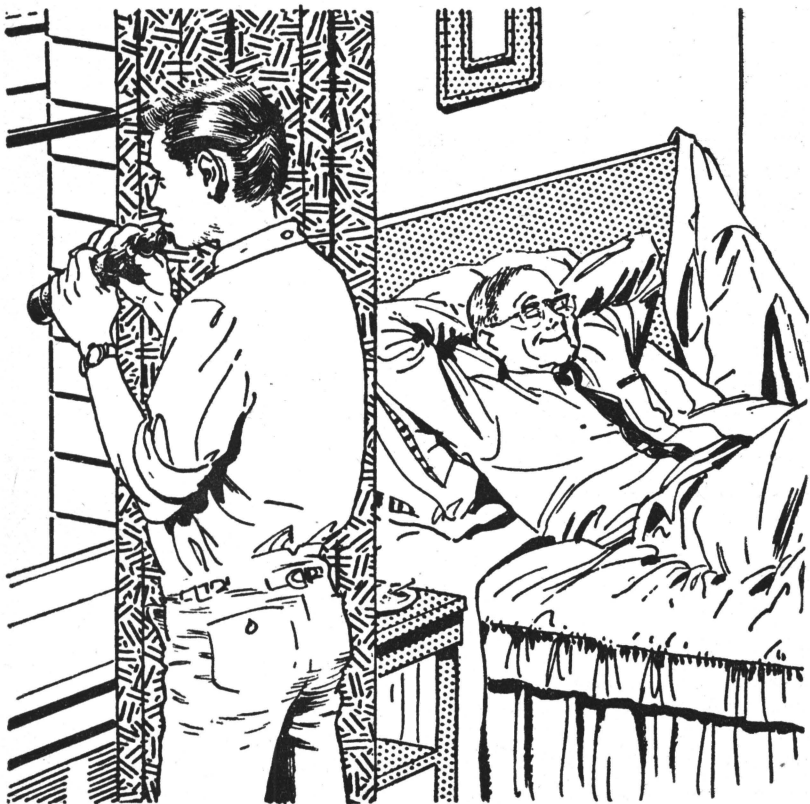


to look through them, with the transmitter that would carry an extra hundred yards easy enough—with everything going for us, we had a chance. Provided Henry had been able to maneuver Chapo so his back was to the window.

The bed merchant gave us a long stall about how the only room we wanted belonged to a sweet old lady that was sick and couldn't be moved. But for ten bucks she could be.

All the time I was wondering how many hands were being played, if we were stuck money and how much—all kinds of things. But finally we got into the room and I laid it out for Skippy. "You aim those field glasses out the window," I told him. "Read Chapo's cards and let me know; that's all. I'll take care of the rest."

I'll say this for him, duck-tail haircut and all, he set-



tled right down to business. I made myself comfortable on the bed and rattled them off on the transmitter as he read the cards to me. I couldn't see the players, didn't know the score; but if he was giving the cards to me right, I was getting them out to Henry.

I felt pretty good. I even began to feel kindly toward the kid. At my age, bifocals are standard equipment, but to judge from Skippy's fast, sure call of the cards, his eyesight was twenty-twenty or better.

After about an hour, Skippy put down the glasses and broke the news: the game was over.

We took our time getting back to Henry's place, so Chapo would have time to clear out. Henry greeted us with eight fingers in the air.

Eight hundred? But before I could ask him, he was already talking: "Eight big ones! Eight thousand bucks! And how you did it, I'll never know!"

Well, eight thousand was good news, no doubt of that. I said, "That's the old system, Henry. But we couldn't have done it if you hadn't steered the fish up to the window." And I showed him the Japanese field glasses, grinning.

But he didn't grin back. He looked puzzled. He glanced toward the window.

I looked too, and then I saw what he was puzzled about. It was pretty obvious that Henry had missed my signal. He and

the fish had played by the window, all right.

But the shade was down.

WHEN I turned around to look for Skippy, to ask him some questions, he was gone. Evidently he didn't want to answer.

I beat up and down every block in the neighborhood until I spotted him in a beanery, drinking a cup of coffee and looking worried.

I sat down beside him, quiet. He didn't look around. The counterman opened his mouth to say hello. I shook my head, but Skippy said, "That's all right. I know you're there."

I blinked. This was a creep! But I had to find out what was going on. I said, "You made a mistake, kid."

"Running out?" He shrugged. "It's not the first mistake I made," he said bitterly. "Getting into your little setup with the bugged game came before that."

I said, "You can always quit," but then stopped. Because it was a lie. He couldn't quit—not until I found out how he read Chapo's cards through a drawn shade.

He said drearily, "You've all got me marked lousy, haven't you? Don't kid me about Henry—I know. I'm not so sure about you, but it wouldn't surprise me."

"What are you talking about?"

"I can hear every word

that's on Henry's mind," he said somberly. "You, no. Some people I can hear, some I can't; you're one I can't."

"What kind of goofy talk is that?" I demanded. But, to tell you the truth, I didn't think it was so goofy. The window shade was a lot goofier.

"All my life," said Skippy, "I've been hearing the voices. It doesn't matter if they talk out loud or not. Most people I can hear, even when they don't want me to. Field glasses? I didn't need field glasses. I could hear every thought that went through Chapo's mind, clear across the street. Henry too. That's how I know." He hesitated, looking at me. "You think Henry took eight thousand off Chapo, don't you? It was ten."

I said, "Prove it."

The kid finished his coffee. "Well," he said, "you want to know what the countermand's got on his mind?" He leaned over and whispered to me.

I yelled, "That's a lousy thing to say!"

Everybody was looking at us. He said softly, "You see what it's like? I don't want to hear all this stuff! You think the countermand's got a bad mind, you ought to listen in on Henry's." He looked along the stools. "See that fat little woman down at the end? She's going to order another cheese Danish."

He hadn't even finished talking when the woman was

calling the countermand, and she got another cheese Danish. I thought it over. What he said about Henry holding out on me made it real serious. I had to have more proof.

But I didn't like Skippy's idea of proof. He offered to call off what everybody in the beanery was going to do next, barring three or four he said were silent, like me. That wasn't good enough. "Come along with me," I told him, and we took off for Jake's spot.

That's a twenty-four-hour place and the doorman knows me. I knew Jake and I knew his roulette wheel was gaffed. I walked right up to the wheel, and whispered to the kid, "Can you read the dealer?" He smiled and nodded. "All right. Call black or red."

The wheel spun, but that didn't stop the betting. Jake's hungry. In his place you can still bet for a few seconds after the wheel starts turning.

"Black," Skippy said.

I threw down fifty bucks. Black it was.

That rattled me.

"Call again," I said.

When Skippy said black, I put the fifty on red. Black won it.

"Let's go," I said, and led the kid out of there.

He was looking puzzled. "How come—"

"How come I played to lose?" I patted his shoulder. "Sonny, you got a lot to learn."

Jake's is no fair game. This was only a dry run."

Then I got rid of him, because I had something to do.

**H**ENRY came across. He even looked embarrassed. "I figured," he said, "uh, I figured that the expenses—"

"Save it," I told him. "All I want is my split."

He handed it over, but I kept my hand out, waiting. After a minute he got the idea. He reached down inside the waistband of his pants, pulled loose the tape that held the dimes to his skin and handed over the radio receiver. "That's it, huh?" he said.

"That's it."

"Take your best shot," he said glumly. "But mark my words. You're not going to make out on your own."

"I won't be on my own," I told him, and left him then. By myself? Not a chance! It was going to be Skippy and me, all the way. Not only could he read minds, but the capper was that he couldn't read mine! Otherwise, you can understand, I might not want him around all the time.

But this way I had my own personal bug in every game in town, and I didn't even have to spend for batteries. Card games, gaffed wheels, everything. Down at the track he could follow the smart-money guys around and let me know what they knew, which was plenty. We could even go up

against the legit games in Nevada, with no worry about bluffs.

And think of the fringe benefits! With Skippy giving the women a preliminary screening, I could save a lot of wasted time. At my age, time is nothing to be wasted.

I could understand a lot about Skippy now—why he didn't like most people, why he laughed at jokes nobody else thought were funny, or even could hear. But everybody has got to like somebody, and I had the edge over most of the human race. He didn't know what I was thinking.

And then, take away the voices in his head, and Skippy didn't have much left. He wasn't very smart. If he had half as much in the way of brains as he did in the way of private radar, he would have figured all these angles out for himself long ago. No, he needed me. And I needed him. We were all set to make a big score together, so I went back to his rooming house where I'd told him to wait, to get going on the big time.

However, Henry had more brains than Skippy.

I hadn't told Henry who tipped me off, but it didn't take him long to work out. After all, I had told him I was going out to look for Skippy, and I came right back and called him for holding out. No, it didn't take much brains. All he had to do was come around

to Skippy's place and give him a little lesson about talking.

So when I walked in the door, Skippy was there, but he was out cold, with lumps on his forehead and a stupid grin on his face. I woke him up, and he recognized me.

But you don't make your TV set play better by kicking it. You don't help a fine Swiss watch by pounding it on an anvil. Skippy could walk and talk all right, but something was missing. "The voices!" he yelled, sitting up on the edge of the bed.

I got a quick attack of cold fear. "Skippy! What's the matter? Don't you hear them any more?"

He looked at me in a panic. "Oh, I hear them all right. But they're all different now. I mean—it isn't English any more. In fact, it isn't any language at all!"

**L**IKE I say, I'm a genius. Skippy wouldn't lie to me; he's not smart enough. If he says he hears voices, he hears voices.

Being a genius, my theory is that when Henry worked Skippy over, he jarred his tuning strips, or whatever it is, so now Skippy's receiving on another frequency. Make sense? I'm positive about it.

He sticks to the same story, telling me about what he's hearing inside his head, and he's too stupid to make it all up.

There are some parts of it I don't have all figured out yet, but I'll get them. Like what he tells me about the people—I *guess* they're people—whose voices he hears. They're skinny and furry and very religious. He can't understand their language, but he gets pictures from them, and he told me what he saw. They worship the Moon, he says. Only that's wrong too, because he says they worship two moons, and everybody knows there's only one. But I'll figure it out; I have to, because I have to get Skippy back in business.

Meanwhile it's pretty lonesome. I spend a lot of time down around the old neighborhood, but I haven't set up another partner for taking the card players. That seems like pretty small stuff now. And I don't talk to Henry when I see him. And I *never* go in the beanery when that counterman is on duty. I've got enough troubles in the world; I don't have to add to them by associating with *his* kind.

**END**



*The Arctic Sea was deadly*

*in every way—*

*its icy water, crushing ice,  
avid beasts.*

*Still something there  
was more lethal than these!*

By HAYDEN HOWARD

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

# MURDER BENEATH THE POLAR ICE

WAVELETS of cigarette smoke drifted across the comfortably lounging enlisted men in the air-conditioned compartment of the Fleet Ballistic Missile submarine, as they sat watching Barney. Sweat streaming from his swollen-veined forehead, hurried and grotesque in his black rubber diving suit, exploding triumphant curses like underwater demolition charges, Barney finished tightening the control cables of what resembled a torpedo with two open cockpits. "This time the little

gal raises her hydroplanes!"

At this contrast of men, the Murderer had to grin, but carefully in order not to sweat and ruin the insulating qualities of his three woolen layers of longjohns. The submariners seemed quiet-talking and cooperative, as well adjusted as sardines in a can. The diver, Barney, was foul-mouthed and fiercely individualistic, a wonderful guy—his diving buddy.

A legend in his own time, Barney was reputed to have arisen from the mine-strewn waters of the Korean coast at the time of the Wonsan-Inchon landings to give advice to General MacArthur.

As an Underwater Demolition Team diver, Barney dated clear back into the Murderer's childhood recollections of World War II, to dim names like Kwajalein and Guam, where former Seabees became combat divers to wire and blast Japanese underwater obstacles and leave welcoming signs for the Marines.

Barney was only quiet about two things, his age and his circumference. He still fancied himself a baseball catcher, and his stubby fingers showed the deleterious effects of grabbing at foul tips with a bare hand, but those same fingers could expertly repair a wristwatch and the automatic transmission of an admiral's car and hock one and "borrow" the other.

Barney had managed to put

his homely younger sister through college and was now maneuvering to marry her off to a lieutenant commander on the staff of Admiral Rickover. And he could expertly joke the fears out of his diving buddy.

Winking at his comfortably smoke-filled audience, Barney dumped a sack of non-magnetic tools into the forward cockpit of the minisub he personally had built, and cocked his head.

"Murderer, here, is hoping the villain is a sea serpent. Don't laugh, you sea horses. The latest scuttlebutt from Alaska has it that every time a picket buoy goes dead out here under the ice, the last sound it broadcasts is a sort of toothy crunch."

**H**E pushed the joke a little further. "Turn your periscopes on the blade Murderer's wearing! John Paul Jones used to issue those for cutlasses! Murderer's hoping to fight the sea serpent hand to hand."

His grin widening with embarrassment, the Murderer felt called upon to retort. "I'll give you a better suspect for stealing our picket buoys. Santa Claus. These are his territorial waters. Are you aware that in the Middle Ages Santa Claus was the patron saint of thieves?"

"Now, Mr. College Boy," Barney began, "you just want to show us you also studied

history, not just marine biology. This boy will even tell you a long Latin name for a little something that floats like dandruff in the water." A touch of pride appeared in Barney's voice. "He can tell you its whole life history and what eats it and why it's important and why it will be a lot more important fifty years from now when *your* kids will need a lot more food from the sea."

There was a perceptible slowing, and the weird sound from the atomic submarine's heat-exchanger muted. Barney glanced at his pressure-proof watch. The Murderer tensed.

"This college boy may look like a tennis player," Barney went on as if nothing had happened, "but in the water, when Murderer sees something swimming down there, he doesn't care how big it is. We were installing the broadcast aerial from a picket buoy up through ice, and Murderer had just retracted the magnesium flare pole, so I'm half-blinded. I look down. I see something so big I want to get out of there on a bicycle. But down Murderer swims with the magnesium flare in one hand and his cutlass in the other. It's a shark as big as a small whale. The flare hypnotizes it, and round and round they go, with Murderer stabbing away, letting in sea water, until that shark bugs out of there like a bare-bot-

tomed boy from a swarm of bumblebees!"

The Murderer studied his depth gauge to cover his embarrassment. The reason the shark had been so big was that it belonged to a species with the whale-like habit of straining the water for minute crustaceans. It was harmless and had winced from his first thrust. Then its shagreen hide had tensed to armor-toughness, and it had been like trying to stab a submarine. It left because it had no reason to stay.

"I'm *relieved*," one of the submariners laughed, "that stabbing *fish* is how he got the name Murderer."

"Not only fish," Barney went on enthusiastically. "This boy almost got himself court-martialed. We're working from the icebreaker, out from Point Barrow, diving from a whaleboat, and before the Annapolis ensign can say a word, Murderer's over the side. We put our face-plates in the water. He's bubbling down on a walrus! I swear, he rides it like a bucking horse. You need a long blade in the arctic. And ugly—when we bent a cable to that walrus from the icebreaker, the walrus stalled the winch!"

"What about tusks?" a submariner's voice asked.

**T**HE Murderer had been well aware of tusks. For three days he had been study-



ing the walrus herd with fascination. These staring-eyed, noisy mammals were living in icy water that would numb and kill a man in a few minutes.

Some of them were diving to clam beds more than two hundred and fifty feet down, where their bodies were subjected to a pressure of more than eight atmospheres. In shallower water, where cockles predominated, he had actually observed them raking the muddy bottom with their tusks and rising with great disintegrating masses of mud and shells between their flippers. Few men had ever seen that.

He marveled at the evolutionary process by which some primitive land mammal of the Eocene Period had become the walrus.

**W**HY he had swum down and attacked a walrus, he did not know. Afterward he felt ashamed, not just because it was a dumb thing to do and he'd had three ribs cracked and should have been killed; not because it was a show-off thing, with sailors urging him to stand in front of its hoisted body so they could take pictures for their girl friends; not because Barney lost his appetite for a couple of days and didn't seem very eager to dive near the herd. What bothered him was the indescribable feeling

he'd had as he swam down with his knife to the walrus, a feeling closer than hunger...

"When we get back, I'll show you the photographs," Barney was insisting proudly. "When they assigned this boy as my diving buddy, they sent his name along, Murderer. If it swims, Murderer will go down after it, they said. And they weren't lying."

But that was *not* how the name originated. Sitting there in the drifting cigarette smoke, feeling the sweat soak through his longjohns, the Murderer wished the submarine's commander would hurry up and decide on a position, let them out of the boat, get it over with.

Probably by now, even the guys who were in U.D.T. training with him believed he got the name by murdering fish.

*They* gave the name to him, but it was during an orientation meeting with diagrams and graphs and talk of megatons and current-borne radioactivity and a model of an atomic depth charge on the table. An incredulous revulsion had come over him, this mindlessly mechanical can of death that could poison, could make *useless* two billion struggling years of life, all wasted, single-celled ancestors, diatoms, copepods, wondrous fish.

During the discussion, he

had kept exclaiming: "It's *murder!* It's *murder!*" This was how he had acquired his name.

"Hey, Murderer," one of the submariners laughed. "You should cut off a sea serpent steak for the skipper. I bet he'd go for one."

"Speaking of murderers," the Murderer blurted, suddenly detesting the name, raising his clean-cut, angrily intelligent face, flooding his longjohns with angry sweat, "you all are potential murderers—on a big scale. Let's say ten thousand victims apiece. I kill a few fish, so I'm a murderer? But you are all gears and cogs of a mass production murder mechanism called a Fleet Ballistic Missile submarine. An impersonal machine that—"

"Not impersonal," the commander's voice said clearly as he came into the compartment. "This boat is just another tool for survival—like a shield or spear. Men make the decisions for it."

**B**ARNEY said in an attempt to ease the tension, "You want us to bring you any ice cubes, Commander?"

The commander's gray eyes studied Barney's red-veined ones. "Just bring yourselves back, Barney. We'll settle for that." He touched the minisub. "All I can say is we *think* we're in the sector where the picket buoys shorted out.

There've been such meager appropriations for hydrographic surveys in the Arctic Ocean, we haven't a very clear picture of fathometer landmarks even in this sector. So the navigator has depended pretty heavily on his dead reckoning and inertial navigation. What I'm getting at is don't spend too much time looking. Use conservative search patterns. Give yourself plenty of margin to find your way home to us. We'll do our best to hold this position."

Slowly, the commander smiled. "We'll keep the coffee hot until you get back."

The Murderer watched them roll the minisub along on its cradle and into the chamber. From the stern, the minisub looked less like a torpedo. Instead of the compact round propeller blades associated with high speeds under water, the minisub had long narrow blades which might have looked more appropriate on a Wright Brother's airplane. These would unwind through the water so slowly there would be no cavitation, no tell-tale bubbling sounds.

"One last thing," the commander said, including the Murderer in his gray gaze. "No aggressive action. If you should meet—someone—break off contact in a dignified manner and come home."

Strangely, the commander smiled again and glanced at his watch. "Right about now,

my two kids are waking from their afternoon naps and running out into the backyard in their underpants to swing on the swings. No aggressive action, O.K.?"

The Murderer felt thankful he was not the commander—with the responsibility for sixteen hydrogen-warheaded Polaris missiles on his back.

Weighted down by his air tanks, the Murderer crawled into the chamber beside the minisub and reached into the stern cockpit. He unreeled a few feet of the red wire and plugged it into the chest socket of his electric suit warmer. Out there, you couldn't search very long without battery heat from the minisub.

Automatically checking his full-face mask, he connected with the black wire and tested his throat mike, earplug circuit. "One—two—three—"

"Four—shut the door," Barney's voice croaked weirdly. For complicated two-man disassemblies underwater, the traditional hand signals were not enough. The minisub acted as a telephone exchange.

**T**URNING from the minisub, Barney plugged into the telephone connection in the wall of the chamber, giving them the word. From the way the Arctic Ocean firehosed into the chamber, the Murderer guessed they had at least a hundred feet of water standing on them. This cap-

tain had no intention of smashing his periscopes on pack ice.

Wryly, the Murderer grinned while the water crept up his body. He knew the limiting factor in their search for a picket buoy, any picket buoy, was the survival time in their air tanks. As for the minisub, it had the capability of keeping their corpses warm for several hours thereafter. With its gyroscope efficiently clicking commands to the rudder, it would maintain a straighter course than any man could steer. If it could eat fish and reproduce itself . . .

The waterline rose above his glass face-plate. On the curved ceilings of the chamber, the air shrank into a squirming bubble. The pressure had been equalized. There was a cold metallic screech as Barney opened the outer hatch into the Arctic Ocean.

Valving an additional hiss of compressed air into the minisub's forward flotation tank, the Murderer gave it a gentle push and rode it out, his hand on the air release valve now to prevent the increasingly buoyant minisub from falling upward against the white-glaring underside of the ice pack.

"There's a hell of a current up here," Barney's voice croaked.

The Murderer glanced

down, and his free arm clutched the cockpit in an anthropoidal fear-reflex of falling. The water was that clear. Down there, the submarine seemed to drift away like a great dirigible in the wind, but the Murderer knew the minisub was actually doing the drifting.

"Tinker carefully with your gyroscope, Mr. Navigator," Barney laughed, "and we'll go take a look for your sea serpent."

He gave Barney a straight course into the current. The Murderer had had nightmares of being lost under the arctic ice pack.

"Keep an eye peeled on the ice," Barney muttered, but the Murderer kept both eyes on the instruments and gave Barney a one-hundred-eighty-degree change of course, trying to determine the speed of the current.

"One way's as good as another," Barney laughed.

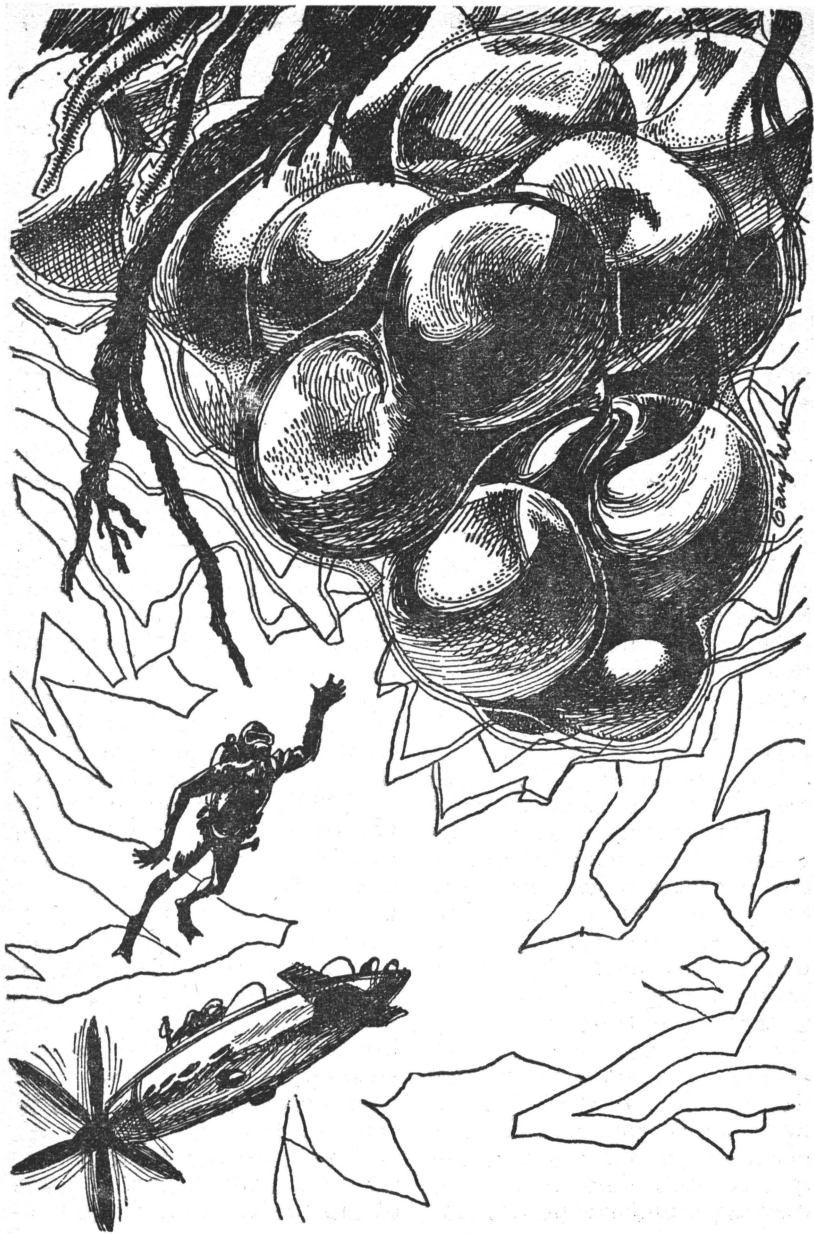
Unfortunately, this had to be a visual search. The drawing-board boys had designed the picket buoys so they would *not* be detected, and thoughtfully made them self-destroying in case they were. If anywhere near, a submarine would be recorded, and the under-ice warning system had actually worked against their own submarines. But the picket buoys in this sector, one by one, had died without a warning sound except, as scut-

tlebutt would have it, a toothy crunch.

"This pack ice has changed," Barney's voice muttered.

Barney and the Murderer had been one of the diving teams out there when a submarine ejected the buoys beneath the polar ice. A buoy would squirt from a torpedo tube. When the non-magnetic float struck the underside of the ice, metal rods clutched upward like the legs of a spider clinging to the ice. A thread-like cable lowered the tiny instrument capsule into the depths. The capsule's small size was intended to foil typical mine detection sonar, while the float was supposed to merge with irregularities of sonic reflection on the underside of the ice. Some admiral had even ordered the floats painted white, but they still cut off light and appeared dark from beneath the ice.

**A**FTER the divers had melted a quick hole through two or three feet of pack ice and extended the whip-like aerial into the polar air, headquarters could keep track of the drifting buoy's location. Intermittently, for the classified number of years the batteries were supposed to last, each buoy would broadcast its own identification code, only coming through with a high wattage warning when its instrument capsule in the depths of the Arctic Ocean was awak-



ened. The joker here, the Murderer thought, was that the aerals might be hard to see, but any simple fool could make himself a radio location finder. *Live* buoys could be hunted from the surface ice.

"How dry I am," Barney's voice croaked unmusically, "how dry I be, nobody knows—nobody cares—"

Now the white underside of the ice drooped in downward bulges, indicating thicker masses of old ice that had been frozen into the pack. The Murderer saw the gray outline of driftwood entombed in this old ice.

"Drift ice from the Siberian rivers," Barney croaked. "When we planted the picket buoys, our sector didn't have any of this."

The Murderer looked down at his instruments, preparing to change course.

"My God, look!" Barney's voice croaked, and his black rubber arm pointed upward.

The Murderer's breathing stopped as he made out something quivering up there. "What is it?"

"Animal, vegetable or mineral," Barney wheezed. "If it's animal, I don't want to be around when whatever laid these *eggs* comes back."

Swaying up there on the underside of the ice in a gelatinous mass at least twenty feet across, it resembled a mass of gigantic frog's eggs.

But the Murderer decided

there was too great a variation in size for them to be eggs. Those nearest the outside of the mass seemed clearer, more transparent, than the surrounding gelatinous substance. The Murderer's excitement began to fade.

"They're not eggs," he said disappointedly. "I think they're only bubbles encased in some sort of soft plastic."

"Mineral," Barney said with some relief in his voice. "Now I see that dark part in the middle has the shape of a can. The bubbles must be to float a mine or secret mechanism," his voice ended excitedly. Barney wanted nothing to do with live things; he liked mechanical devices that clicked and buzzed and could be taken apart and then put back together.

He eased the minisub up toward the gelatinous mass.

"Don't bring the minisub too close," the Murderer gasped, imagining a mechanical click as the impersonal gadgetry within the can detected their approach and cocked the lifeless steel prongs of a detonator.

Barney laughed in excited contrast. "Even our air tanks are non-magnetic. Or if it's hydrophonic, the noise level to set it off would have to be plenty high, because of all the crunching sounds every day in the ice. I'm going to find out what it is."

Barney rose from his cock-

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pit, trailing his green-stained canvas bag of non-magnetic tools.

"You're not going to cut into it, are you?" the Murderer cried.

"That's what the taxpayers pay me for—to protect them from—you name it. Murderer, you sail the minisub off until all my telephone cable is out. Just like when we practiced disarming our picket buoys, I'll tell you every move I make."

"If it's a mine," the Murderer said, "I'll be as flattened as you."

"Take notes on your navigational pad. I'll start with a little experimental cut into the jello. We can't go off and leave this thing; we'd never find it again. And it wouldn't be exactly smart to tow it to our submarine until we know what its insides are supposed to do."

**B**ARNEY'S black rubber arm was sawing vigorously up and down. "This jello's tougher than it looks. Very ingenious. I'll bet this was a compact little bundle when a submarine ejected it into the water. Probably sea water makes it swell—and chemicals fizz inside so that the bubbles appear and float the can up to the underside of the ice.

"This is important," Barney's voice croaked on. "I've come to some thin shiny wires.

They seem to be all through the jello and to curve back in toward the can."

The Murderer clenched his hand. He could feel the tendons and imagine the wonderfully intricate nerves of his living hand. He'd been frightened many times under the sea. Occasionally divers talked about which way they'd rather go. Nitrogen narcosis was popular among the heavy drinkers. Barney's choice—a nice close mine explosion because it would be so quick. They thought the Murderer was crazy when he said he'd rather be eaten by a Great White Shark than smashed by some miserable explosive gadget.

"Now I'm spreading two wires apart," Barney said calmly, "but I've left a layer of gelatin around each of them. I will not cut the wires and I'll try not to let them touch each other."

Gradually his head and shoulders disappeared up into the gelatinous mass.

"Don't snag your tanks or regulator on a wire," the Murderer breathed.

"Now I'm cutting within a few inches of the base of the can." Only Barney's kicking legs showed. "My air is filling the cut—and I'm going—to open a—chimney." Bubbles emerged from the side of the swaying mass.

"Suppose this thing is atomic," the Murderer said.



"It would crush our ballistic missile sub from here."

"This is peacetime, boy. Nobody's fool enough to let an atomic mine go drifting around with the ice."

The Murderer looked down at the hard metal shell of the minisub. You could blast and smash it, and it would still be metal. You even could vaporize it, and its atomic particles would be somewhere—or changed into energy—but nothing really lost, because it had never been alive. The Murderer thought of the commander's two kids waking from their naps. It had taken life two billion years to get that far, and it all could be lost. Right now, was Barney committing *aggressive* action?

He thought again of that orientation class where they theoretically learned how to disarm an unexploded atomic depth charge. He had expressed his feeling that these atomic charges were *murder*. The fools had laughed and begun calling him Murderer.

"The bottom of this can is as blank," Barney said, "as a sailor in one of those modern art museums. I'm going to cut my way along the side of the can and see what I can see."

A little fish, perhaps lost from its school, peered into the Murderer's glass faceplate. Its wondrous eye grew inquisitively larger, and he thought of the millions of co-operating cells that made up

its eye and optic nerve and receiving brain and the marvel that the individually drifting cells of two billion years ago could have achieved this.

There was a contradiction, he thought. He was amazed by life and yet he speared fish. Did he enjoy feeling life wriggle on the end of his spear?

"I've reached the top," Barney's voice croaked. "There's a rod here—get this, a vertical rod. It extends up into the ice like with the aerials of our picket buoys. I knew it wasn't a mine. This is how they plan to detect our atomic submarines. This will make a very interesting present for Admiral Rickover—"

At this instant there was a darkening slap against the Murderer's mask. His eardrums burst inward. His intestines squeezed up into his chest from the force of the underwater explosion. He blacked out.

**I**CE water seared his face. He was drowning. Convulsively, his hand groped for his mask. The glass was intact. His hand dragged the mask back to a proper fit upon his face, and compressed air forced out the sea water. He could feel the telephone cord pulling at his mask.

Everything was blinding white, and he realized he was belly up beneath the ice. "Barney?"

The telephone wire began

to drag him down head first, and he went down it hand over hand toward the slowly sinking minisub. "Barney?"

Further down, he saw Barney's black rubber suit spread-eagled and sinking, and he swam clumsily down past the minisub. He clutched Barney's black rubber arm and dragged it toward the minisub. The black rubber suit seemed to have no bones. Everything drooped and swayed as he tried to fit Barney into the stern cockpit. When he wrapped Barney's wires to tie him in, they came face to face. There was no glass in Barney's mask. The glass had burst where the face had been.

**MURDERER'S** eyes narrowed in helpless rage at Barney's death.

Dragging himself into Barney's forward cockpit, he valved air into the minisub's forward flotation tank, raising the torpedo-like nose. It was then that he saw them up there, silhouetted small and frog-like against the blinding white ice, two divers.

The two silhouettes were looking down at him, and he knew they had been attracted by the explosion of their gelatinous picket buoy. He looked all around for the dim gray outline of their submarine, but there was no sign of their "home," and his gaze concentrated with wide-eyed intensity on their black paddling

shapes as his minisub rose from the depths.

He saw them exchange hurried hand signals. They began to swim away, side by side, their fins fluttering rapidly now. They were swimming a definite course, and still there was no sign of their submarine as his minisub inexorably gained on them.

Now that he had reached their altitude, he noticed they were already tiring. One diver looked back, then swam frantically to catch up with the other. Like a slow fighter plane, the minisub came in on them from behind, and one diver pushed at the other. They again exchanged hand signals, losing yards to the minisub, and one began to swim hard while the other turned back, facing the minisub, raising his hand in what appeared to be a courteous military salute. The minisub kept coming straight at him.

Then the diver spread his arms in a gesture of peace. The minisub's torpedo-shaped nose rammed his belly. Unsheathing his long blade, the Murderer struck.

As the diver wriggled, the Murderer withdrew the blade and struck again. Air bubbles streamed from the diver's chest with each exhalation of breath as he backwatered. His expression seemed mild surprise as the Murderer struck a third time, driving the blade down between the man's neck

and collar bone, pushing him deeper. The next blow smashed the mask. Belatedly, the man's hand flurried, seeming to clutch at his bubbles as he sank.

The Murderer looked up. Far off under the ice, the other diver had stopped, was looking down, watching, and the Murderer held up his blade as a signal and turned the minisub upward, after him. This diver took evasive action among the downward bulges of old Siberian ice and suddenly vanished.

Although there was no sky glare in the water, the Murderer supposed the diver had found an open lead in the ice and would rather freeze to death, or at least put up a fight from the edge of the ice, than die in the water.

**V**ALVING more air into the minisub's flotation tanks, the Murderer steered it rapidly up into the oddly round, oddly dim lead in the ice pack. At the edge of his mask-vision he glimpsed a longish tubular shape suspended in the water, but the minisub was rising too fast for him to get a good look. The overbuoyant minisub bloomed above the surface and sloshed back, rolling unsteadily while the film of water slid off his mask without freezing and he saw.

The white blur became the biggest twin-rotored copter he had ever seen, squatting there

on the ice, white except for its glass. Then his eyes were attracted by motion, by the parka-clad men hauling the surviving diver up on the ice. Other darkish figures were simply standing there, some of them beginning to point.

Behind them was a smaller helicopter with the loop-shaped aerial of a radio location finder mounted atop its plastic dome. There was something wrong with the sky, and the Murderer realized it was not the sky. It was a vast white canvas dome, dimpling in the polar wind. The unnatural circle in the ice and the equipment grouped around it all were hidden from aerial observation.

Pointing at him from the fuselage of the huge helicopter, and so close that his eyes had avoided it, was a metal boom with a hoist cable taut into the water, tethering something below the surface. Some of the men were running toward the huge helicopter now. In front of them at the edge of the ice lay shapeless bundles of what appeared to be black rubberized canvas, and he wondered fleetingly if these contained more of the soon-to-be gelatinous picket buoys. One of the figures was aiming something at him. As the Murderer let air out of the flotation tanks and swiftly sank, he realized it had not been a gun; it had been a camera with a telephoto lens.

He passed the tubular shape on the end of the cable. It was an anti-submarine torpedo. When he sank deeper, he passed a cylinder dangling from two black rubber-insulated cables.

He valved compressed air back into the flotation tanks and came up under the ice, so hazardingly close he had to duck his head as he steered a weaving course among the downward bulges of old Siberian ice. Even though he had been deafened, he felt the sonar pulsing against the ice, searching for him. Then he felt it knocking against the minisub, pinging against his air tanks, thudding accusingly against his bones. It followed him wherever he steered.

He smiled bleakly. This would be the ultimate if they unleashed the expensively intricate homing torpedo—at one man riding a cheap minisub constructed by a big-handed, happily singing petty officer on his own time. He hoped they *would* waste the torpedo on him. If he had to be destroyed by a gadget, an infernal machine, at least it was better to be killed as an individual rather than in a group so large he would be nameless in death.

Abruptly the sonar left him. They must have decided he was not going to lead them back to his submarine. Now they were hurriedly ranging for it.

He cruised on and on with his dead cargo.

Then he felt the echo of sonar from the submarine's hull. He must be close. The helicopter, with its sonar system lowered into the water like a fisherman's hook, had caught the Fleet Ballistic Missile submarine.

He could feel the submarine's sonar searching frantically. They would be sounding for another submarine. He could imagine horror on the sonar men's faces as they realized they couldn't detect anything at the apparent source of the unidentified sonar that had caught them.

The submarine's sonar caught something—him.

**H**E STEERED directly into it and found the submarine. Bow into the current, the gray undersea boat was still holding its position. The Murderer guessed the commander had decided that the best move was no move.

Valving out air, he brought the minisub down, opened the outer hatch and dragged the minisub into the water-filled chamber. A great weariness had come over him and it was all he could do to lock the hatch. He knocked on the bulkhead, while the persistent sonar pinging went on and on. Someone tapped very gently, although they might as well hammer with a wrench; it wouldn't make any difference

now. The Murderer realized they were waiting for him to plug into the telephone socket and give his maximum depth and time spent there and other decompression data he hadn't kept. They intended to decompress him as if this were just another safe-and-sane training exercise.

In the chamber lights, Barney's rubber suit had sagged over the side of the minisub like a black rag doll. The Murderer averted his eyes and plugged in.

"One—two—three—" he said automatically.

"Barney?"

"Barney's dead."

"This is the commander. There is a submarine out there. For some reason, we can't locate it with our sonar. Have you seen it?"

"Commander, it's a helicopter. They have an anti-submarine torpedo in the water."

"I'm having difficulty reading you—"

"Helicopter. Anti-sub torpedo!"

"Did they take any aggressive action against you?"

"Depends on how you look at it. Their picket buoys are under here. Barney tried to recover one. It was booby-trapped to destroy itself."

"Barney?" the commander's voice persisted.

"I told you he's dead! I got one of their divers."

"One of their divers? He was attacking you?"

"I killed him. He was trying to get away."

There was a long pause. Only the persistent knocking of the giant helicopter's sonar reached the Murderer's ear.

When the commander spoke again, it was as if murder had been done. "Do they know?"

"The other one looked back. Sure they know. They know."

"Then they may consider we're the ones who've taken aggressive action," the commander said slowly. "We'll have to wait. If we move off, their commanding officers on the spot may feel committed to local retaliatory action. We'll have to wait while they're radioing for instructions. We'll have to hope their side will decide to take this before an international court."

"Court? What sort of court? A murder court?"

"Let's hope it's only one murder," the commander's voice came through distantly, "and not one hundred million. We'll have to sit it out."

As decompression began, the Murderer sank down beside Barney's body in the water-filled chamber. Superimposed upon the commander's two little kids, swinging on their swings, he saw the surprised face of the diver—and even the little fish, lost from its school, and its wondrous eye—two billion years of evolution waiting for a verdict of life or death.

**END**

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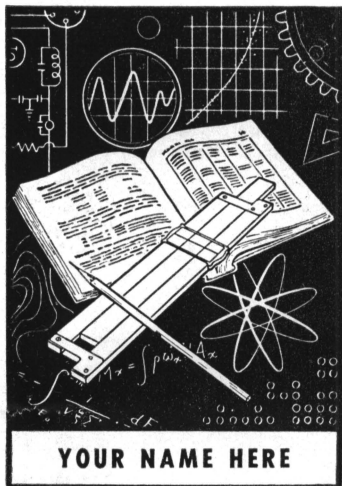
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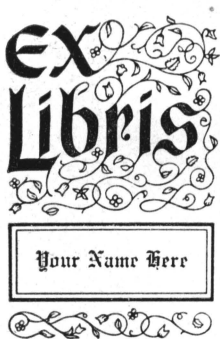
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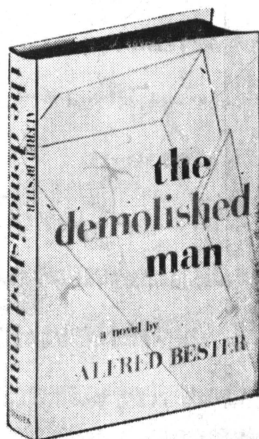
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